2007-12

Confronting the ghost of Stalin Euro-Atlantic efforts to secure Georgia

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NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**CONFRONTING THE GHOST OF STALIN:
EURO-ATLANTIC EFFORTS TO SECURE GEORGIA**

by

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December 2007

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188

1. AGENCY USE ONLY *(Leave blank)*	2. REPORT DATE December 2007	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's Thesis

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Confronting the Ghost of Stalin: Euro-Atlantic Efforts to Secure Georgia	5. FUNDING NUMBERS
6. AUTHOR(S) Paul F. Geehreng	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A	10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER

11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.

12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited	12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE

13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

Since achieving independence in 1991 with the fall of the Soviet Union, Georgia has become the most westward-oriented state in the Transcaucasus. The government in Tbilisi has departed from two centuries of union with Russia and vigorously pursued NATO membership as an avenue for restoration of its full sovereignty, domestic reform, economic development, and Euro-Atlantic integration. This first objective has been hampered by Russian-backed separatist regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Moscow has made its view clear that NATO encroachment into the South Caucasus poses a threat to its national security. Through overt threats, economic pressures, diplomatic control of the separatist regions, and covert attacks, the Kremlin has attempted to keep Georgia destabilized and dependent on Russia's good will. Its zero-sum, realist foreign policy opposes the institutional argument of enhancing security by diffusing democratic norms. This thesis will show how the degree to which Western governments are willing to confront coercive activity will largely determine the success or failure of Georgia's transition to a stable democracy.

14. SUBJECT TERMS NATO enlargement, Georgia, Russia, ethnic separatism, deterrence, realism, neo-liberal institutionalism	15. NUMBER OF PAGES 115
	16. PRICE CODE

17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT
Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified	UU

NSN 7540-01-280-5500 Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. 239-18

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CONFRONTING THE GHOST OF STALIN:
EURO-ATLANTIC EFFORTS TO SECURE GEORGIA

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

from the

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
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ABSTRACT

Since achieving independence in 1991 with the fall of the Soviet Union, Georgia has become the most westward-oriented state in the Transcaucasus. The government in Tbilisi has departed from two centuries of union with Russia and vigorously pursued NATO membership as an avenue for restoration of its full sovereignty, domestic reform, economic development, and Euro-Atlantic integration. This first objective has been hampered by Russian-backed separatist regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Moscow has made its view clear that NATO encroachment into the South Caucasus poses a threat to its national security. Through overt threats, economic pressures, diplomatic control of the separatist regions, and covert attacks, the Kremlin has attempted to keep Georgia destabilized and dependent on Russia's good will. Its zero-sum, realist foreign policy opposes the institutional argument of enhancing security by diffusing democratic norms. This thesis will show how the degree to which Western governments are willing to confront coercive activity will largely determine the success or failure of Georgia's transition to a stable democracy.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As my esteemed advisors often point out, a thesis is as much a process of building networks as it is reading books and articles. With that in mind, I would like to thank Professors Tsypkin and Abenheim for all their insight and help pointing me toward valuable sources. This dynamic duo truly places the students' interests first and provides a wellspring of sage advice and rapier wit.

Through the course of my research I have met some extraordinary people. Too numerous to list individually, my thanks go out to them collectively for their time and assistance. I would especially like to express my gratitude to the U.S. Air Force Institute for National Security Studies. Without their generous grant I would not have had the opportunity to visit the wonderful Republic of Georgia. Likewise, I would be remiss not to thank the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies for the tremendous support they offered me during my stay in Tbilisi. My visit would not have been remotely as productive without their help.

Most importantly, I would like to express my deep appreciation and affection to my wife and daughters for their love, inspiration, understanding, and even – when necessary – occasional prodding. They have made the effort worthwhile and the journey enjoyable.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. THE TIES THAT BIND: RUSSIA'S CAUCASIAN LEGACY

The Georgian nation is centuries old, boasting a proud civilization within the traditionally geo-strategic land bridge of the Transcaucasus. Despite countless invasions of foreign armies, Georgia as a national and political entity remained vibrant within relatively stable borders throughout the ages. To accomplish this feat in such a difficult neighborhood often required tribute to a regional hegemon. With the omnipresent existential threat from the Persian and Ottoman empires to the south, the Bagratid monarchy won the protection of the tsar in 1783. By 1801, however, the Russian empire had formally annexed Georgia and assumed the dominant position within the Transcaucasus. With only a brief interlude of independence following the Russian Revolution, Georgia joined the Soviet Union in 1921 through the force of the Red Army.[1] Through the tsarist and Soviet experiences, Georgia has come to recognize its relationship with Russia to be unidirectional; it must demonstrate complete submission to Moscow to receive benevolent treatment in return. This thesis will explore the shifting relationship between the two states as Georgia has set its foreign policy on a path of Western integration. Russian elites remain emotionally attached to the Transcaucasian region as their exclusive domain.[2] Therefore, rational calculations of national interest, embedded in a post-imperial mindset, have led Russian leaders to manipulate instability on their borders rather than allow their erstwhile vassals to depart the fold.

Many of the issues that continue to plague Georgian-Russian relations originated during the Soviet period. While not as elevated as Ukraine and certainly not equal with the RSFSR, the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic

[1] Ronald G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation, Second Edition.* Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994, 58-59, 208-209.

[2] Numerous Western and Georgian officials. Interviews by author, 1-12 October 2007, Brussels, Belgium, Tbilisi, Georgia, and Washington, DC.

enjoyed a respectable status among the Soviet republics. This could be explained in part by its reputation for producing quality wines, fruits, and tobacco, as well as providing communist officials with magnificent Black Sea resorts.[3] In addition to supplying such luxury items, Georgia bestowed upon the Soviet Union its most defining leader, Iosef Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, better known to the world as Josef Stalin. It was Stalin who drew the Soviet Union's internal borders according to its numerous nationalities. His purpose in this endeavor was clearly aimed at minimizing nationalist influence by dividing ethnic regions and creating minority enclaves within each district.[4] The unintended consequences, however, produced quite the opposite results.

By establishing autonomous regions within the communist bureaucratic structure, Stalin's nationality policy not only lent credibility to the notion of ethnic self-rule, but the infrastructure for its execution as well. Georgia's privileged status, however, by no means translated into exemption from the carnage of Stalin's paranoia. He divided his own ethnic homeland with three sub-regions to check Georgian nationalism.[5] Inside the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, he established the Abkhaz and Ajar Associated Republics and the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. While many Georgians excuse the atrocities of their native son, from the point of view of the ethnic minorities, Stalin's Georgian heritage indicates his bias against their interests and explained his discriminatory policies.[6] These three groups embrace varying degrees of ethnic identity: The Abkhaz nation extends back roughly as far as the Georgians; the South Ossetians claim ties to brethren across the Caucasian mountain range currently in the Russian Federation; and the Ajarans are essentially ethnic Georgians who

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[3] Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation,* 268.

[4] Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991.* New York, NY: The Free Press, 1994, 439.

[5] Ibid., 439-442.

[6] International Crisis Group, "Abkhazia Today," *Europe Report* N°176, September 15, 2006, 3-5; and Salome Asatiani, "The Great Terror: In Stalin's Birthplace, Forgiving and Forgetting," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty,* August 14, 2007 http://www.rferl.org/features/features_Article.aspx?m=08&y=2007&id=9C771836-1431-44D6-88A0-21F92CC4EE2F accessed 21 August 2007.

collectively converted to Islam under Ottoman rule. Stalin's nationality policy granted territorial boundaries and titular autonomy around which to crystallize nationalist sentiments.

As the central control of the Soviet Union withered in the late 1980s, nationalist movements throughout the Transcaucasus region gained momentum. As a result, by the time the U.S.S.R. finally crumbled in 1991, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were on the verge of civil war to escape the hyper-nationalism of Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia by clinging to their Soviet autonomy.[7] Over two years of bloodshed resulted in stalemates that left both separatist regions with de facto control of their territory but at least nominally still within the confines of Georgian borders. Russian peacekeepers, with UN blessing, have patrolled these zones ever since while Moscow has sought to preserve this unresolved status quo. In response, Georgian leaders have taken steps to turn the traditional north-south axis of power 90° by enticing European and American interests and seeking membership in the Western institutions, particularly the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU).

B. TBILISI LOOKS TO THE WEST: A NEW AXIS EMERGING

This thesis will explore the impact of Georgia's steps toward NATO membership on Russian national security perceptions. As a former Soviet republic, Georgia falls within the sphere of influence over which Russia claims exclusive dominance. While independence came relatively easily with the Soviet Union's demise in 1991, Georgia has since struggled to consolidate its sovereignty. It faces the existential challenges of exerting central control over its various regions and freeing itself from the Russian Federation's overbearing influence.[8] The Georgian government has undertaken a deliberate ideological shift toward democratic institutions and the rapturous courting of Western

[7] Director of Georgian non-governmental organization. Interview by author, 5 October 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia.

[8] Dov Lynch, "Why Georgia Matters," *Chaillot Paper*, Nº86, February 2006, 17.

organizations. The Euro-Atlantic community has responded with alternately enthusiastic and lukewarm acceptance.[9] U.S. and European engagement has increased over the past decade but still with relatively little energy. This thesis will analyze the spectrum of Western interaction with Russia toward achieving stability in Georgia. The ultimate goal is to assess the impact of Western institutions, specifically NATO, the EU, and the OSCE, in counterbalancing Russian interventions, which are often at cross purposes to Georgian interests.

Enjoying immense revenues from elevated global oil and natural gas prices, Russia has begun reasserting itself in the region it describes as its "near abroad." While this term has largely disappeared from official usage in light of its pejorative connotations of limited sovereignty, it still appears to accurately describe Moscow's perceptions of its fellow former Soviet neighbors. The government in Tbilisi anticipates that NATO membership would offset Russian influence by providing a counterweight to its renewed attempts at regional hegemony. In addition, Georgian officials hope to prevent a 1921-style re-annexation through NATO's Article 5 mutual defense clause.[10] The question for NATO policymakers is how much engagement is required with Moscow to smoothly cement Georgia's entry into the Euro-Atlantic alliance. Is it better, or even possible, to co-opt Russian policymakers into supporting the treaty? Or is it better to move forward despite Russian reservations regarding the alliance and present Moscow with a *fait accompli*?

The major sticking point in this process is the necessity to resolve the "frozen conflicts." Three quarters of a century after Stalin carved the Soviet Union into ethnic enclaves, the international community is still compelled to deal with its aftereffects. The two separatist regions within Georgia exemplify this dilemma and pose a hurdle for Georgia's NATO aspirations. Per alliance enlargement policy, applicant nations must demonstrate "that they treat minority

[9] Jim Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Political Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests.* Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, 12 July 2007, RL33453, 2-3.

[10] U.S. State Department official. Interview by author, 20 July 2007, Monterey CA.

populations in accordance with the guidelines of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); have resolved outstanding disputes with neighbours and have made an overall commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes;" as well as commitment to the democratic values shared in the alliance.[11] Abkhazia and South Ossetia both seek to perpetuate the autonomy they enjoyed under the Soviet system and have therefore declared their independence from Georgia. The support they receive from the Russian Federation, moral as well as material, encourages both to harden their stance against a negotiated settlement. The secessionist leaders also accuse Tbilisi of preparing for renewed hostilities to eliminate resistance, an accusation based on recent operations to reclaim control over portions of its territory. These issues must reach a peaceful conclusion for membership to even become an option for Georgia.

Russia views NATO's encroachment into its "near abroad" as a threat to its security. While this notion may seem a Cold War anachronism to Western observers, the perception remains entrenched in Russian security circles. One reason for this perception is likely to be the equation of spreading democratic values with regime change. The Russian government did not welcome the democratic revolutions – Rose in Georgia, Orange in Ukraine, and Tulip in Kyrgyzstan, all between 2003 and 2005 – with the same enthusiasm as in the West. In fact, the increasingly authoritarian regime in Moscow seems to fear these upheavals as bad precedents and resents the Euro-Atlantic community for instigating them.[12]

The European Union has welcomed Georgia's overtures with far less enthusiasm than has the United States. While offering engagement through its "neighborhood policy," the EU has made it clear that Tbilisi should not expect an

[11] NATO Topics, "Enlargement: What does this mean in practice?" http://www.nato.int/issues/enlargement/in_practice.htm, updated 18 February 2005, accessed 7 February 2007.

[12] Lynch, 49.

invitation to join the union in the foreseeable future.[13] OSCE presence has also proved hesitant, a reflection of Russia's influence in the organization and resistance to Western institutions within its sphere of influence. How then to convince Russian policymakers that allowing NATO into its domain would likely bring stability to an otherwise chaotic neighborhood? The inherent dilemma illustrates the difficulty for neo-liberal institutions in seeking positive-sum outcomes with a realist partner playing a zero-sum game.

[13] Mark Leonard and Charles Grant, "Georgia and the EU: Can Europe's Neighborhood Policy Deliver," *Policy Brief.* London: Centre for European Reform, September 2005, 1, 8.

Figure 1. The Republic of Georgia with separatist regions of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Ajara depicted. (From [14])

[14] International Crisis Group archives http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/popup.cfm?i=/library/images/europe/georgia_detail.jpg accessed 6 September 2007.

C. AN INTENSIFYING DEBATE

Despite the West's mixed reception, the Transcaucasus region is drawing increasing attention in the last few years in terms of spreading democracy and geopolitical implications. Along with greater diplomatic and economic activity has come a great deal of literature published on the region. In every case Russia figures prominently; in fact, one can barely speak of the Caucasus without referencing Russia's heavy influence: past, present, and future. A divergence of opinion emerges with regard to what role the traditional hegemon should play, especially vis-à-vis the potential for enhanced Western influence.

Within this overarching theme of great power influence, the literature has shifted over time to reflect the evolving situation on the ground. Early writers on the subject of Transcaucasian nation-building tended first of all to assign blame for the origins of the conflicts. The majority of the authors tended to sympathize with the separatists in light of hyper-nationalist activities on the part of Tbilisi and the Georgian people. These actions undermined the liberalization process begun following the Soviet implosion and further fragmented the heterogeneous society.[15] In this context, Russia's interventions appear not only as pragmatic efforts to secure its southern borders, but well-intentioned attempts to defend minority populations. The internal weakness of Georgian authorities naturally invited their stronger neighbor to intercede and quell the unrest, lest it spill over into its own volatile Caucasian republics. These authors foresaw little more than humanitarian assistance from Western institutions.[16]

While rarely excusing Georgia's culpability, other writers of the early post-Soviet days painted Russian intentions in much less benign colors. Shireen Hunter, for example, pointed to "the ruthless Russian determination to bring Georgia to its knees" as contributing to the ethnic conflicts there. She went on to

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[15] Donald V. Schwartz and Razmik Panossian, *Nationalism and History: The Politics of Nation Building in Post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*. Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Centre for Russian and East European Studies, 1994, 142.

[16] John F. R. Wright, Suzanne Goldenberg, and Richard Schofield, *Transcaucasian Boundaries.* New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1995, 147, 175-176, & 189.

call for increased Western activity in the region but with a concerted effort to avoid hostilities with Moscow.[17] Her call for non-hostile Western influence foreshadowed a cacophony of similar – and dissimilar – prescriptions as the new millennium dawned.

One point received nearly universal consensus: Russia's interests matter. Stephan Blank described any policy that expected Moscow to adhere to Western values without consideration for its own vision of interests as delusional. Specifically addressing the notion of spreading democratic institutions through expanding Western institutions, "Moscow repeatedly announced that there were no concessions that could get it to change its mind on these issues and that it opposes NATO enlargement (if not NATO itself) on principle."[18] With the inevitability of conflicting interests, authors have recommended varying courses of action within the former Soviet space.

Many writers advocate a robust policy to strengthen the region through closer ties to the Western community.

> American and European policy-makers have also achieved broad consensus that the best way to secure these [strategic and economic] interests is by supporting the independence of the Caucasian countries, helping to bring about sustainable peaceful resolutions to their conflicts, promoting political, economic and military reform, and encouraging the region's integration into the international community, particularly European and Euro-Atlantic structures.[19]

Even this proposal acknowledged Russia's vital regional interests, which in hind sight has blocked significant action. Nor has consensus proved as solid as therein implied. Another school of thought advocated a much more cautious

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[17] Shireen T. Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation-Building and Conflict.* Washington, DC: The Center for Strategic & International Studies, 1994, 141.

[18] Stephen J. Blank, "Beyond the Founding Act: The Next Stage of NATO-Russian Relations," in Stephen J. Blank, ed. *NATO After Enlargement: New Challenges, New Missions, New Forces.* Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, September 1998, 124-125.

[19] Edmund Herzig, The New Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. New York, NY: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1999, 115.

approach to dealing in the Caucasus. "The challenge of how best to engage Russia and provide for out-of-area operations that are truly out-of-area will continue to plague the [NATO] Alliance, especially in this new and demanding region."[20] These authors weigh Western interests as not worth the potential cost of stepping into prolonged ethnic conflicts, especially in direct competition with a great power with whom diplomats have sought a strategic partnership.

With the experiences of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the 2003 Rose Revolution, the Caucasus in general, and Georgia in particular have drawn much greater transatlantic attention. Realists and neo-liberal institutionalists found common cause in engaging the South Caucasus. Authors cite both moral and strategic arguments for deeper integration: from rectifying decades of Soviet oppression and securing the blessings of liberty to projecting peace and stability into an otherwise dynamic region bordering on the contentious Middle East.[21] The rhetoric has increased dramatically in recent months as the tone of Moscow's diplomacy has become ever more belligerent regarding NATO's activities in the former Soviet Union. Svante Cornell began his latest assessment with a page-long indictment of Russian foreign policy directed toward Georgia and its breakaway republics. He recommends firm policies in response:

> In bilateral relations with Moscow, only a frank statement of American policy and interests works; clarity and predictability undermines the room for Russian manipulation in Eurasia. The track record shows that hesitance on the West's behalf results in Russian counteroffensives; on the other hand, Russia normally accepts and moves on when it becomes clear it will not be able to

[20] Rachel Bronson, "NATO's Expanding Presence in the Caucasus and Central Asia," in Stephen J. Blank, ed. NATO After Enlargement: New Challenges, New Missions, New Forces. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, September 1998, 250.

[21] Ronald D. Asmus and Bruce P. Jackson, "The Black Sea and the Frontiers of Freedom: Towards a new Euro-Atlantic Strategy," *Policy Review,* 125 (June and July 2004) http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/3437816.html, accessed 7 February 2007.

> reverse a certain development, as long as that does not infringe on its vital national security interests, as opposed to its neo-imperial ambitions.[22]

This sentiment has not, however, drowned out the argument against getting involved in Caucasian ethnic politics. The realist camp, as articulated by Dmitri Simes, still contends that American interests do not warrant activities that risk provoking a potentially nuclear contest with a resurgent Russia.[23]

The debate over Euro-Atlantic responsibilities regarding Eastern Europe has periodically dominated great power diplomacy, most notably at the Versailles and Yalta conferences. The delicate balance between values and interests continues to shape U.S. and European policy toward a region with aspiring democratic intentions and geostrategic implications. This thesis intends to explore this debate with particular regard to Georgia's ethno-national separatist regions. The goal therefore is to reach an independent conclusion and lend support to the most rational position.

To reach this objective, most sources will come from government and non-government official publications, academic journals, and interviews. These interviews include telephonic and email correspondence as well as in-person contact through a grant for travel to Washington, D.C. and Europe. These sources will illustrate the spectrum of Western-Russian relations with regard to Georgia, from conflict at one extreme to cooperation at the other.

D. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

To show this spectrum, research will focus primarily on analyzing case studies based on the interactions involved. A matrix can compare the two variables with a scale of assertive-to-conciliatory Euro-Atlantic involvement shown against relative concessions granted by Russia.

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[22] Svante Cornell, Georgia After the Rose Revolution: Geopolitical Predicament and Implications for U.S. Policy. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, February 2007, 1-2, 37.

[23] Dmitri K. Simes, "Priorities, Not Delusions," The National Interest Online, April 25, 2007 http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=14156 accessed May 6, 2007.

1. CONFLICT	**2. COUNTERBALANCE**
• Assertive Western involvement • Few/Small Russian concessions	• Assertive Western involvement • Many/Large Russian concessions
3. DISENGAGEMENT	**4. COOPERATION**
• Conciliatory Western policy/ non-involvement • Few/Small Russian concessions	• Conciliatory Western policy/ cooperative, multilateral involvement • Many/Large Russian concessions

Figure 2. Interaction Matrix

Block 1 CONFLICT – To date there has not been a conflict over the Caucasus between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community. This fortunate circumstance can be explained in realist terms that the region does not present vital national interests to the Western democracies that would warrant conflict. Neo-liberals would point to the success of multilateral institutions promoting dialogue over the use of force. The record shows Russia exerting a great deal of coercion on Georgia, but Europe and North America have not intervened on an issue deemed vital to the Russians. This block therefore remains hypothetical, but as Western interests increase in the Caucasus, it could become a very real possibility.

Block 2 COUNTERBALANCE – Since 9/11, Western institutions and governments, particularly the United States, have assumed a more assertive posture vis-à-vis the Russian presence in Georgia. Examples include the 2002-2004 U.S. Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP) and condemnations of Russian attacks in the Pankisi Gorge. Moscow reluctantly accepted the U.S. military presence and backed off from its threats to invade the Pankisi area.

Block 3 DISENGAGEMENT – Immediately following the Soviet Union's demise, most Euro-Atlantic policy-makers adopted a Russia-first philosophy. This policy of taking small, incremental steps into the former Soviet sphere,

always with an eye on avoiding conflict with Moscow, has lingered to the present day. Examples include Western reluctance to internationalize the peacekeeping and negotiation process for the ethnic conflicts, as well as the OSCE removal of its Border Monitoring Operation (BMO) in 2004 and the EU's refusal to replace it.

Block 4 COOPERATION – Just as there has not been outright great-power conflict over Georgia, nor has there been true cooperation. The UN Secretary General's "Group of Friends," which includes the United States, Russia, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, has provided the best opportunity for cooperative, multilateral solutions. However, Russia has demonstrated more inclination to defend Abkhaz and Ossetian intransigence than help facilitate a solution. Therefore, this block also remains hypothetical until the Group of Friends reaches a consensus.

The following chapters will each delve into case studies of conflicts within Georgia. One chapter each will cover the frozen separatist conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. There is also a chapter to examine the handling of Chechen refugees in the Pankisi Gorge region, along with the controversial 11 March and 6 August 2007 attacks on Georgian territory. Each chapter will discuss the involvement of various Western governments and organizations, to include NATO, OSCE, the European Union in general, and the United States directly. The sub-questions surrounding each institution will include its level of involvement in each situation from 1991 to present day. Types of involvement include military personnel, financial and material aid, and diplomatic support. The second sub-question looks into the relationship of these activities with their Russian counterparts: what affect did they have on Russian policy toward the conflicts? A concluding chapter will summarize the findings of each case study and propose implications for U.S. and European policy toward Georgia. Before engaging the case studies, however, it will be useful to frame the debate with a discussion of the major explanatory perspectives: realism and neo-liberal institutionalism.

E. COMPETING THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

For centuries debates among scholars have raged over the nature of international relations. Realists contend that the anarchic international system makes states the principal actors and stability the ultimate goal. Liberal theories, on the other hand, expand the playbill of political actors and advocate international regimes to help regulate society. Each set of theories offers valid explanations in certain circumstances, yet neither can boast universal applicability. Great powers often choose to act through intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) but reserve the sovereign right to exercise unilateral displays of power.

With regards to the separatist regions within Georgia, more than a decade of diplomacy has failed to produce a solution to the frozen conflicts. During this time, an array of IGOs has played various roles in peacekeeping operations and negotiations: the United Nations (UN), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), NATO and the EU. In many ways, these organizations function at the pleasure of great power members. Significantly, the United States and Russia have staked out opposing positions over the contested issues. Both great powers head a regional organization – NATO and the CIS respectively – and both are members of the UN and OSCE.

While the United States and especially Russia both address the situation with unilateral measures, they each see fit to couch most actions through one or more of these IGOs. Understanding the rationale for these policy choices will therefore help illuminate the tension between state-centric realist theories and regime-based institutionalism. In other words, do the great powers merely wield IGOs as a veil of legitimacy in pursuit of their interests or do these institutions truly limit their power? While the answer is certainly mixed and largely circumstantial, the trend in international politics leans in favor of the neo-liberal institutionalist argument.

1. Stability through State Power: The Realist Perspective

From before the days of recorded history, groups of people have enforced their will on smaller, weaker groups. Realist authors consider this process to be the natural course of human interactions and project its amoral prescriptions onto the international scene. They therefore recommend actions appropriate to the world *as it is* rather than as it should be. Thucydides illustrated this idea with the Athenian response to Melian steadfastness in the face of existential threats:

> …you seem to us quite unique in your ability to consider the future as something more certain than what is before your eyes, and to see uncertainties as realities, *simply because you would like them to be so* . . . so in all these [hopes] you will find yourselves most completely deluded.[24]

Realists thus extend little hope for altering the international system of anarchy in pursuit of idealistic norms.

Instead, realists concentrate on states as the ultimate authority in global politics. Reflecting on the flawed nature of the human character, Hans Morgenthau expressed the vision of classical realists as the pursuit of rational state interests through force and intimidation. He renounces policies designed for moral ambitions as folly and criticizes the common attempt among states to cloak their actions in universal values.[25] Yet even in this stark view of the world, in which power prevails over norms, cooperation among states is possible although limited and generally temporary.

Kenneth Waltz acknowledges the presence and practicality of international organizations as a process for ordering state interactions. However, he strongly rejects replacing the international self-help system with a hierarchical structure

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[24] Thucydides, "The Melian Dialogue," *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 407. [emphasis added].

[25] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace.* New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1948, 4-13.

that would invite competition among powerful states to control it.[26] Over the last three decades realists have conducted an internal debate over the role of institutions as such organizations have become an increasingly empirical element of international politics.

John Mearsheimer, keeping in line with Waltz's structural realist philosophy, contends that institutions merely reflect the interests and manipulations of the great powers and therefore impose few, if any, boundaries on state behavior. States cooperate only to further their own national security, and even then worry about relative distributions of power and the constant temptation of their partners to defect. Therefore, great powers create institutions simply to maintain their dominant positions.[27] Not all scholars share the same outlook, however; others take a more tempered view of realism.

Joseph Nye generally considers multilateralism as more beneficial in the long run than it is costly in the short run. Unlike more traditional realists, he advocates strategic primacy of multilateral policies but still reserves the right of unilateral action for issues of vital national security, to promote global public good, or to prevent multilateral efforts contrary to one's values. Multilateralism is therefore a tool to enhance a state's "soft power," the ability to secure its interests through the appeal of one's values rather than through force of arms.[28]

Nye's emphasis on employing power, albeit soft power, to achieve state goals arguably places him in the realist school; however, he certainly represents a cross-over to neo-liberal institutionalism considering he co-authored one of the founding works on the theory with Robert Keohane. With international organizations taking on increasingly significant roles, realists have had to address them as a political reality. The erosion of state sovereignty in the face of

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[26] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics.* Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 1979, 111-114.

[27] John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security* 19 3 (Winter 1994/95), 7, 12-13.

[28] Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 9, 158-163.

rising transnational dilemmas and non-state actors has forced a new look at *realpolitik*.[29] In this way, realists have begun to recognize that institutions will not soon disappear from international politics. The questions remaining are in what circumstances and to what degree do institutions regulate state actions? The neo-liberal camp has more to say in those regards.

2. Complex Interdependence: The Neo-Liberal Perspective

While international institutions themselves are not new entities – examples date back centuries – academic focus on their political implications have mushroomed more recently along with the concomitant rise of liberal institutions following World War II and particularly in the wake of the Cold War. Writing during the heart of the latter conflict, Keohane and Nye outlined their alternative to traditional realist conceptions: "complex interdependence." As evidenced by their title, *Power and Interdependence*, institutionalism does not represent a wholesale rejection of power in international relations; rather the theory broadens the definition of power beyond military force alone.[30]

In addition to countering realism's emphasis on national security, the ideal type of complex interdependence questions the unity and primacy of state actors. Instead, they point out multiple layers of interactions among various government agencies as well as among societies in general. Additionally, state leaders focus on mutually achieving absolute gains, a positive-sum game, rather than the realists' concern over zero-sum relative gains. The end result is a leveling of the international playing field as weaker states enjoy a greater voice in setting the global agenda, thus diminishing force as the sole arbiter of international relations.[31]

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[29] Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 3-5, 141.

[30] Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence, 2nd ed.* Harvard: Harper Collins, 1989 [1st edition in 1977], 24-36.

[31] Ibid.

Building on this concept of complex interdependence, Robert Axelrod studied ways to foster cooperation among actors. His analysis demonstrated how states can emerge from the "prisoners' dilemma" of mutual mistrust by, among other things, removing uncertainties and ambiguities about the other participants. In other words, if state actors are better able to recognize defection and feel assured that the same partners will meet again under similar circumstances, the fear of reciprocal defections makes the net cost of defection higher than from cooperation. They are therefore more likely to cooperate habitually.[32] Institutions help facilitate this process by normalizing routine interactions.

Robert Keohane explained how international regimes encourage cooperation by establishing forums for routine interactions and injecting transparency into the process. As the regime participants develop norms and rules of bargaining, each state begins to view cooperation and compliance to be in its best interest for fear of losing its reputation as a responsible partner. This effect carries particular weight when numerous issues overlap in the international arena; the regimes therefore lower the cost of repetitive interaction and facilitate "side payments" to reach consensus in otherwise unrelated issues.[33] In this way, cooperation among states is a rational choice for long-term success, even if short-term interests would encourage defection. This function helps explain the exponential increase in international institutions through the latter 20th century.

Many neo-liberal authors spend considerable time explaining the *formation* of institutions before addressing their functions. Toward this end, states still exert significant influence through their various instruments of national power. In evaluating the causes and results of international regimes, Stephen Krasner listed power and self-interest among values and principles as the

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[32] Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation.* United States: Basic Books, 1984, 140, 174.

[33] Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984, 78-79, 90-91.

underlying motivations for creating regulating norms.[34] Taking a more cynical view of institutions, Lloyd Gruber pays even more credence to state power in creating international organizations. He explains the large numbers of states joining supranational bodies, even in cases of apparent sovereign and economic losses, as the choice between two evils. As the creation of two or more powerful partners, these organizations effectively alter the status quo for prospective members to the point that joining represents a smaller loss than exclusion.[35] Krasner and Gruber, like Nye, demonstrate how neo-realists and neo-liberals have come to find some common ground in their view of great powers driving international organizations rather than institutions inevitably binding state action.

Regarding the *functions* of international institutions, some authors predict the trend in increasing international institutionalization as working toward building "global governance." Claiming a middle ground between the historical international anarchy and a highly impractical, hypothetical world state, Volker Rittberger and Bernard Zangl anticipate regimes and institutions regulating state behavior through Axelrod's cooperative norms.[36] Rittberger's philosophy marks the opposite pole to Mearsheimer's admonition about the ineffectiveness of institutions. As already shown, however, several scholars are seeking consensus among the two theories.

Keohane and Nye, as previously noted, epitomize the blending of these two explanations. Yet even in their perspective, realist and neoliberal institutionalist prescriptions represent ideal situations, neither of which truly reflects reality. At times, events unfold in a manner best explained by realists; in other circumstances, the situation resembles the ideal type of complex interdependence. Therefore, the key question is not which theory is more

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[34] Stephen D. Krasner, "Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables," in Stephen D. Krasner, ed. *International Regimes.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983, 10-16.

[35] Lloyd Gruber, *Ruling the World: Power Politics and the Rise of Supranational Institutions.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000, 7-10.

[36] Volker Rittberger and Bernard Zangl with Matthias Staisch, *International Organization: Polity, Politics and Policies.* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, 214.

generally applicable, but rather which one best explains the situation at hand.[37] In other words, does the ground-level reality more closely reflect the zero-sum anarchy described by realists, or does it adhere to the norms of institutionalism?

The following sections will apply this theoretical continuum to the ethnic conflicts within Georgia. With great powers supporting the opposing parties, the resolution will likely drift toward one or the other pole on the spectrum of conflict to cooperation. Given Russia's apparent preference for unilateral coercion versus multilateral consensus, cooperation is unlikely, at least in the near term. To the degree that the Euro-Atlantic nations commit to engagement, the remaining question is how much pressure to apply without pushing the situation into open conflict. Furthermore, what strategies exist to eventually ease the conflicts into a cooperative solution? The first case, Abkhazia, represents the most intransigent of the three conflict areas.

[37] Keohane and Nye, 249-250.

II. ABKHAZIA

A. INTRODUCTION: COMPETING NATIONALITIES

As previously noted, the Abkhaz nation traces its lineage back to medieval times parallel with its Georgian neighbors. The ethnic patchwork that defines the Transcaucasus illustrates the failure of any single power to consolidate the region into a broader national entity [see Figure 2]. Given this marbled demography, ethno-national conflict has been a trademark of the region for centuries, long before the emergence of politicized nations. Traditionally, these rival principalities sought protection from one another and from invading armies by soliciting the support of an empire with compatible values. For Christian Georgia, this naturally meant enticing Russian sponsorship. Besides the common religion, Russia provided the only window to the West, especially considering Turkish control of the Black Sea prevented Western European monarchs from answering Georgia's invitations.[38] The first request to the tsar came in the mid-16th century to fend off the Persians and Ottoman Turks, along with powerful North Caucasian tribes.[39] This trend of inviting foreign powers as protectorates has continued through the ages and helps put the current conflict into historical context.

In Abkhazeti, as Abkhazia was historically known, the local rival was the Georgians, despite a fair amount of cultural overlap. Since annexation into the tsarist empire and a subsequent Abkhaz migration to Turkey, the Georgian nation established a clear majority in the region. In fact, by the 1970s it vastly outnumbered the Abkhaz minority even within Abkhazia. To Abkhaz nationalists, who have ardently resisted Georgian rule since the Russian Civil War, this unfavorable statistic mainly reflects the forced repopulation of ethnic Georgians

[38] Director, Georgian NGO. Interview by author, 5 October 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia.

[39] Suny, 49.

into Abkhazia during Stalin's reign.[40] The Abkhaz therefore turned to Moscow to shield them from Tbilisi's interventions. As previously discussed, the ethnicity of the Kremlin ruling clique – Stalin and Lavrenti Beria – did not weigh in Georgia's favor. The current conflict thus extends from the Soviet era as Abkhazia attempts to cling to its Moscow-ensured autonomy.

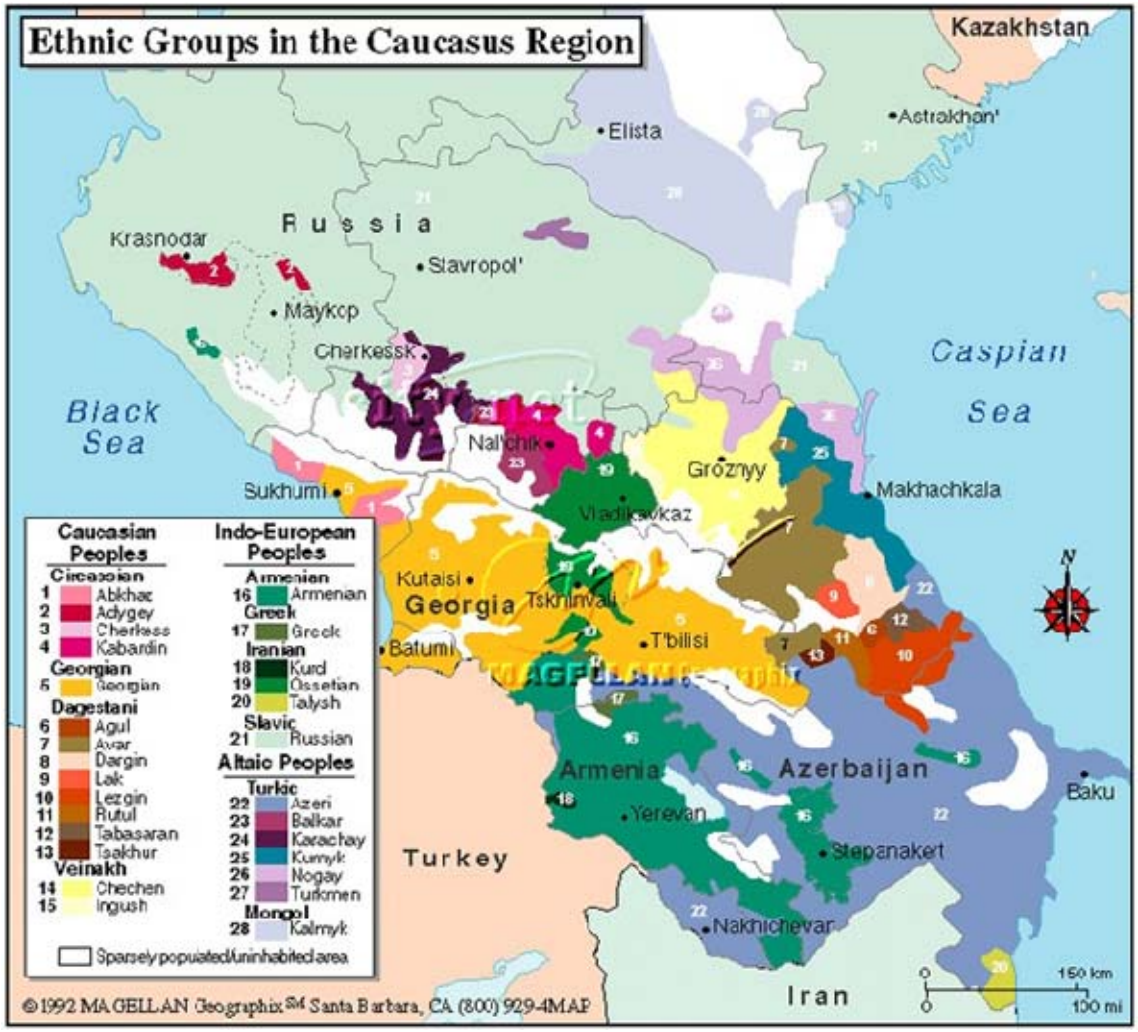

Figure 3. Ethnic Patchwork of the Transcaucasus (From [41])

[40] According the 1979 (and 1989) census reports, the population within the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic was 17% (17.8%) Abkhaz and 43% (45.7%) Georgian. Ethnic Armenian and Russian minorities represent most of the remainder. Suny, 321; and International Crisis Group, "Abkhazia Today," *Europe Report* No176, September 15, 2006, 3.

[41] "Ethnic Groups in the Caucasus Region," *Slavic, East European, and Former USSR Resources*, 9 February 2007 http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/org/armenian/pictures/caucasus.jpg accessed 19 August 2007.

The Georgian nation, on the other hand, ceased viewing the Russians as saviors by the time of the Bolshevik revolution. Through force of arms, Georgia lost its brief independence to the nascent Soviet Union in 1921. The following decades, as already discussed, marked the paradoxical twist of a Georgian dictator ruling the Soviet empire. Despite the extreme human toll of Stalin's reign, many Georgians still regard the man from Gori as a native hero. "For many, it is preferable to look back on the Soviet period as one of 'occupation,' and that Stalin's atrocities were directed not at Georgia, but at the 'occupying' nation – the USSR."[42] In this paradoxical manner, Georgians have adopted the opposite view as the Abkhaz; that is, they credit Stalin with the favorable attributes of the Soviet Union and fault the Russians for all the evils associated with it. Therefore, with newfound independence in 1991, Tbilisi sought a replacement sponsor, this time from outside the traditional Transcaucasian hegemons.

In turning to the West, Georgian leaders highlighted a new rationale for the connection. Russia had historically drawn Georgian affection as co-religionists, especially with regards to the threat of Muslim occupation from the south. In the altered geopolitical landscape of the post-Cold War world, choosing strategic partners based on religion alone no longer served Georgia's interests. Its experiences under the tsarist empire and Soviet Union taught Georgia to value its sovereignty most of all. Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze therefore recognized his opportunity to alter this traditional north-south axis of his country's politics and reestablish east-west links on the pattern of the ancient Silk Road. Through the difficult state-building process of the 1990s, he sought to create an economic "Eurasian Corridor" with Georgia as the pivot point.[43] The Western democracies thus offered an ideological and economic rationale for enhanced relations. However, the degree to which these liberal values and

[42] Asatiani, "The Great Terror: In Stalin's Birthplace, Forgiving and Forgetting."

[43] Georgie Anne Gayer, "Conversations with Eduard Shevardnadze," *The Washington Quarterly* 23:2 (spring 2000), 58-59.

interests measure up against the geostrategic interests of the Russian Federation in no way guarantee a reliable counterbalance. Furthermore, beneath the specific state interests lie fundamentally different views toward NATO expanding into the Caucasus.

B. OLD & NEW SPONSORS: OPPOSING SECURITY OUTLOOKS

1. Russian Realism

To understand Russian geopolitical interests, one must consider their outlook on defense. As an overland empire with few natural boundaries and numerous enemies, Russia has historically chosen expansion as the surest means of holding potential threats at bay. Where direct control through annexation proved infeasible, Russian rulers attempted to establish client states along its periphery and threaten hostile opponents with its menacing military.[44] A policy of defense through expansion cannot succeed indefinitely, though. Having already witnessed the tsar's empire collapse, the high-water mark of Russian influence in Europe arose in the mid-20th century. As Stalin consolidated the territorial gains of the Great Patriotic War into the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet Union enjoyed strategic depth ranging from Mongolia in East Asia to Czechoslovakia in Central Europe. This strategy marked the overlap between military doctrine and foreign policy.

Russia's perennial sense of encirclement has routinely fostered a debate over the strategic primacy of offensive or defensive operations. While officially adopting the offensive-minded "deep battle" doctrine, the geopolitical result remained the same: both offensively and defensively minded Russian strategists traditionally favor confronting their enemies far from the homeland, thus allowing as much space as possible for strategic retreats and counteroffensives.[45] Having twice been invaded from the West, Russia views its security in terms of

[44] Frederick W. Kagan and Robin Higham, *The Military History of Tsarist Russia*. New York, NY: Palgrave, 2002, 8.

[45] Andrei A. Kokoshin, *Soviet Strategic Thought: 1917-91*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999, 160-161, 169.

maintaining geographic separation from its perceived threats. The near-simultaneous collapse of the USSR and Warsaw Pact left the rump Russian Federation with a sense of sudden vulnerability, as evidenced by Moscow's attempts to maintain its border forces along the frontiers of the former Soviet Union.

From the post-modern Western perspective, the risk of large-scale conventional war arguably has diminished greatly since the end of the Cold War. However, the organization seen by Russian planners as the primary threat throughout the Cold War has refused to stand down, despite the end of the conflict. On the contrary, NATO has gradually crept up to Russia's borders, filling the void in Central and Eastern Europe left by the vacating Red Army [see Figures 4 and 5]. In its significantly weakened state throughout the 1990s, Moscow grudgingly accepted NATO's eastward growth as an unavoidable situation.[46] Over the last several years, however, the Russian state has regained enough strength for it to perceive further NATO expansion into its "near abroad" as a preventable step. In fact, a recent draft military doctrine proposed clarifying the threat perceived from NATO enlargement with more direct language. Instead of simply describing "the expansion of military blocs and alliances [as external threats] to the detriment of the Russian Federation's military security," the general staff considers "U.S. efforts to push Russia away from the post-Soviet space a threat to Russia's national security."[47] In such undiplomatic language, the Russian Federation's security arm declares its zero-sum outlook on geopolitics.

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[46] Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade itself for a New Era.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, 298.

[47] "Russia's Military Doctrine," *Arms Control Today*, May 2000, posted 16 June 2000 http://www.freerepublic.com/forum/a394aa0466bfe.htm accessed 23 August 2007; and Makhmut Gareev, President of the Russian Military Sciences Academy as quoted in Victor Yasmann, "Russia: Reviving The Army, Revising Military Doctrine," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* 12 March 2007 http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/3/63173250-a8b3-40d0-a26d-219ed25d91b2.html accessed 21 August 2007.

Figure 4. Post-Cold War Contraction of Russian Control (From [48])

[48] Europe 66, "European Maps: Cold War Division, Map #1," http://astro.temple.edu/~barbday/Europe66/resources/coldwardivisionmap1.htm accessed 26 November 2007. Note how Soviet suzerainty extended as far west as the Austrian border. The non-Russian Soviet republics allowed sovereign control out to Poland and Hungary. Such strategic depth provided Moscow with the state security it lost in 1991 and still desires.

Figure 5. NATO Enlargement, 1949 to Present (From [49])

[49] North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "E-Generation: Maps," http://www.nato.int/icons/map/b-map.jpg accessed 26 November 2007. Post-Cold War NATO enlargement has moved the alliance's borders progressively closer to the Russian Federation. The 1990 and 1999 rounds absorbed the former Warsaw Pact states; the 2004 round penetrated the former Soviet Union; and accepting Georgian or Ukrainian membership would breach the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Through this realist lens, successful NATO expansions into the territory of the Warsaw Pact and especially into the former Soviet Union represent distinct losses of Russian security, influence, and especially prestige. Central to Moscow's often erratic policies toward the West lingered the question of Russia's identity on the world stage. Through the chaotic 1990s, the Russian Federation attempted to maintain the façade of great power status, despite the obvious lack of resources to sustain the illusion. Compounding this dichotomy of Russia's identity, most Russians perceived the West as patronizing their nation's interests and concerns: for instance, economic aid failed to meet expectations and membership into various international organizations met numerous political hurdles.[50] As much as the Russian government desired enhanced relations with the United States and Western Europe, it often felt betrayed by perceived broken pledges from that same community. Specifically regarding NATO enlargement, each round dating back to German reunification in 1990 emerged with the understanding that it represented the last step eastward in alliance membership.[51] Moscow took issue with more than just NATO's growth, as well.

Nineteen ninety-nine marked a pivotal year in Russian-NATO relations. Just two years after the NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security gave Moscow a voice (but not a veto) in NATO matters, the alliance announced its new strategic doctrine authorizing operations beyond its members' borders. Furthermore, NATO consummated this new "out-of-area" concept with an air campaign directed against Serbia, a traditional Russian ally. The Kosovo campaign demonstrated just how little regard the Western alliance apparently held for Russian interests. Not only did NATO proceed despite vociferous Russian protests, it also bypassed a potential Russian veto by sidestepping the UN Security Council. These actions left the Kremlin wondering if the next target might be within the CIS or worse, Russia

[50] Margot Light, "Post-Soviet Russian Foreign Policy: The First Decade," in Archie Brown, ed., *Contemporary Russian Politics: A reader.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 420, 422.

[51] Asmus, 4-5, 67.

itself. "If NATO's eastward expansion was interpreted as a remote and indirect threat to Russian security, the threat represented by the new doctrine seemed far more direct and immediate."[52] In this context, Moscow views Euro-Atlantic sponsorship of Georgian sovereignty not as a potentially stabilizing force but rather as a direct threat to its southern flank.

2. Euro-Atlantic Institutionalism

The western side of the continent sees the world through a more institutional lens. That does not imply a lack of calculated security interests, however. On the contrary, a primary objective of NATO and EU enlargement is to stem the threats that result from latent instability. The experience of Central and Eastern Europe through the 1990s demonstrated the efficacy of enhancing security through the establishment of democratic institutions: for instance, strengthening the rule of law, rooting out corruption, and enforcing transparency in policymaking.[53] The key difference between Russia and the West, therefore, has less to do with how it calculates its interests than with the approach it takes in achieving them.

Article X of the 1949 Washington Treaty outlines the criteria and objectives for expanding the North Atlantic Alliance. Through five successful rounds of enlargement, NATO has more than doubled its membership and extended its security umbrella from the Atlantic to the Baltic and Black Seas. With the latest accession in 2004, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer declared, "It will be a major step toward a long-standing NATO objective: a Europe free, united and secure in peace, democracy and common values."[54] This sentiment largely summarizes the alliance's vision and *raison d'être* for the post-Cold War environment.

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[52] Light, "Post-Soviet Russian Foreign Policy," 425-426.

[53] NATO official. Interview by author, 1 October 2007, Brussels, Belgium.

[54] Jaap de Hoop Scheffer as quoted in "Enhancing Security and Extending Stability Through NATO Enlargement," NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 2004 http://www.nato.int/docu/enlargement/enlargement_eng.pdf accessed 23 August 2007.

Throughout its history, NATO has represented more than simply a military alliance; it is an institution that bonds together liberal nations and reinforces their democratic institutions. It goes beyond merely coordinating military action to deter and repel a hostile, presumably Soviet, invasion. It also focuses attention on eliminating the sources of instability through bolstering "inside" security, i.e. good governance through liberal institutions.[55] From the organization's inception, the founding members institutionalized these norms into the Washington Treaty.

The preamble and Article I frame the allies' guiding principles within the United Nations Charter: "They are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law."[56] Article II, the linchpin clause in terms of espousing internal security, furthers these ideals by calling on member states to

> contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being.[57]

These liberal values translate into national security interests, especially in the post-Cold War era when the transitional democracies of Central and Eastern Europe bear as much chance of collapsing into chaos as they present the opportunity to develop into stable, mature partners.[58]

For the newly independent states of the former Soviet bloc, NATO also offers more than simple military security. It provides member states with legitimate influence in steering alliance strategy. Articles IX and IV respectively

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[55] Alexandra Gheciu, *NATO in the "New Europe:" The Politics of International Socialization after the Cold War.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005, 4, 232.

[56] North Atlantic Treaty Organization. "The North Atlantic Treaty." Washington, DC, April 4, 1949. *NATO Handbook.* Brussels, Belgium: Public Diplomacy Division, 2006, preamble.

[57] Ibid., art. II.

[58] Gheciu, *NATO in the "New Europe,"* 5.

commit the allies to consult with each other routinely in peacetime endeavors and in times of crisis. Naturally, the United States and other large allies command enough resources and influence to drive the agenda, but the treaty's consultation norms permit smaller states a voice in the internal processes of these larger democracies. Through transnational and transgovernmental coalitions, as well as emphasis on shared community values, the smaller partners can project their interests onto the alliance agenda.[59] This phenomenon provides incentives for the emerging democratic governments to deepen their involvement in the organization, which in turn further strengthens their liberal institutions.

There is little question that Georgia has embraced these incentives of NATO membership. Additionally, its domestic institutions, especially since the Rose Revolution, have generally followed an upward trajectory toward alliance standards. Of course, there remains a great deal of work to accomplish in this area, as evidenced by the recent crackdown on mass protests in the capital.[60] More relevant, perhaps, to Georgia's eventual accession in the Euro-Atlantic alliance is the realist debate within Western circles. While U.S. policy affirms its support for Georgian membership, some elements within the government urge against deepening involvement in an area rife with ethnic tension. Of course, realist arguments can also point to geopolitical interests that call for increased presence. By this line of reasoning, Western efforts to stabilize the region will facilitate enhanced security in the North Caucasus as well as permit applications of power on Iran.[61] The diverging debate over interests is even more magnified in European circles.

Underlying European interests in the Caucasus are its varying relationships with Russia. Considering the proximity and living memory of Soviet

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[59] Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation Among Democracies: The European Influence on U.S. Foreign Policy.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995, 39.

[60] Nichol, RL33453, 15-16; and "Georgian Leader Imposes a State of Emergency," *New York Times*, 8 November 2007.

[61] Jim Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Security Issues and Implications for U.S. Interests.* Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, 16 April 2007, RL30679, 42-43.

influence, the emotional reaction to resurgent Russian power is much stronger in Eastern Europe than it is further west. As much as the countries of the former communist bloc espouse the liberal norms of the NATO charter, they also clearly desire the Article V promise of military assistance as a deterrent to neo-imperial Russian aggression, however irrational such a fear may prove to be. The original NATO allies, on the other hand, display less overt fear and prefer to engage with Russia as a partner and thus show a bit more sympathy to Russian interests.[62] As a result of their distrust, however, the newer NATO members provide much more vocal support for the newly independent states, with whom they greatly empathize. Considering the lack of consensus over Western policy toward the former Soviet states that remain outside the alliance, it is not surprising that Russia has met little resistance in exerting its influence in the South Caucasus.

C. THE HESITANT ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

From the beginning of the post-Soviet period, Moscow has played a controversial role in the Abkhaz conflict. The Georgian government has long accused the Kremlin of actively supporting the separatist cause while cloaking its actions in a mantle of legality through United Nations mandates. Meanwhile, Russia claims to be acting out of purely humanitarian intentions, defending the underdog position.[63] By controlling both the separatist party to the conflict and the peace process itself, Russia holds the levers to maintain the status quo indefinitely, at least without outside intervention.[64]

The Western role has certainly been minimal relative to that of the Russians. The latter indeed brought the Abkhaz civil war to conclusion through use of its diplomatic services. The Moscow Agreement of May 1994 outlined the ceasefire accords and won UN backing for deploying a Commonwealth of

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[62] Anatol Lieven, "Conclusions: The Pangs of Disappointed Love? A Divided West and Its Multiple Peripheries," in Anatol Lieven and Dmitri Trenin, eds., *Ambivalent Neighbors: The EU, NATO, and the Price of Membership.* Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003, 298-300.

[63] ICG, "Abkhazia Today," 7.

[64] NATO official. Interview by author, 1 October 2007, Brussels, Belgium.

Independent States Peacekeeping Force (CISPKF). This mandate, while routinely receiving its necessary renewals, has not once been updated to reflect changing dynamics on the ground. Meanwhile negotiations toward a final resolution continue in Geneva under UN auspices and international observation but through Russian facilitation.[65] The international community, overwhelmed with the increasing number of intra-state conflicts requiring its attention, welcomed the notion of delegating resolution of this conflict to Moscow.

In the early aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, the West simply winked at Russian intervention in the Caucasus. Throughout the 1990s, Euro-Atlantic policy-makers pursued a decidedly Russo-centric foreign policy. Fearing regression of the still infantile Russian democratization, Western governments supported Moscow's initiatives along its periphery, often at the expense of support for the similarly struggling democratic efforts within these newly independent states. Likewise, besides a desire to gain access to Caspian-based energy resources, the limited Western interests in the Caucasus prompted leaders to avoid committing their own troops, another implicit nod to lingering Russian hegemony in the region.[66] On the scale of Western involvement [Figure 1], the early 1990s clearly marked a period of disengagement. The result of Western ambivalence toward the non-Russian FSU states permitted Moscow wide latitude to pursue its regional ambitions. These involved efforts to reassert its dominant influence, to include the semi-legitimate use of force.

To characterize Russian foreign policy of this early post-Soviet period in such decisive terms, however, conveys a cohesiveness that simply did not exist for several years. In many cases, Russian troops found themselves engaged in conflicts without clear orders from Moscow. The situation in Abkhazia certainly fits this category. Unable to redeploy home amidst the political chaos of transition, forces stationed in Georgia took matters into their own hands, either

[65] ICG, "Abkhazia Today," 6-7.

[66] Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition*, 157-159.

passively or actively.[67] Passive support followed the sentiment expressed in the aphorism, "we don't want to fight; here – take my weapon, you can fight each other."[68] Active support involved local commanders acting on their own initiative, often motivated by a professional hatred of Eduard Shevardnadze, whom they personally blamed for destroying the Soviet Union. As a result, portions of the Russian military actively sought to subvert his credibility through participation in the separatist conflict.[69] Regardless of motivation or national intent, the sum result of Russian presence during the Abkhaz civil war provided the impetus needed for the separatist minority to successfully evict hundreds of thousands of ethnic Georgians. Yet, even after this successful ethnic cleansing, the Abkhaz constitute only 45% of their own local population, behind the combined Russian and Armenian populations.[70] While the Abkhaz appear quite sincere in their quest for national self-determination, from the beginning they have depended entirely on Russian support. As a result, the situation quickly became a tool of Russian foreign policy.

By mid-decade, Moscow achieved its initial foreign policy goals through forceful manipulation of the ethnic chaos. Once President Shevardnadze promised the appropriate concessions, the Kremlin shifted its support from the separatists to the central government. Specifically, the Kremlin sought universal CIS membership and basing rights for the Russian military – both to patrol the Turkish border and otherwise exert influence through garrison presence.[71] Through the Moscow Agreement and its UN endorsement, the CISPKF, which is

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[67] Dmitri Trenin, "Russia," in Trevor Findlay, ed. Challenges for the New Peacekeepers: SIPRI Research Report No. 12. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996, 69-70.

[68] John Mackinlay and Peter Cross, eds. *Regional Peacekeepers: The Paradox of Russian Peacekeeping.* New York, NY: United Nations University Press, 2003, 66.

[69] Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition,* 131.

[70] Jelena Radoman, "Future Kosovo Status – Precedent or Universal Solution," *International Perspective* UDK 341.223(4); 341.231(497.115), 16 http://www.ceeol.com/aspx/getdocument.aspx?logid=5&id=471B0587-8A12-46DF-9B17-ED91E4192791 accessed 7 October 2007; also Georgian official. Interview by author, 4 October 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia.

[71] Svante Cornell, *Georgia After the Rose Revolution: Geopolitical Predicament and Implications for U.S. Policy*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, February 2007, 19.

entirely a Russian force, effectively enforces the status quo while the political settlement stagnates in Russia's favor. Evidence of such partiality include issuing Russian citizenship to Abkhaz inhabitants while emphasizing the right to protect its citizens abroad; slapping a discriminatory visa regime on Georgia while exempting the separatist residents; and appointing Russian security officials to the Abkhaz de facto regime's cabinet.[72] Furthermore, the Abkhaz de facto leadership defers all decisions regarding conflict settlement to Moscow.[73] While the peace process simmers, the Russian government enjoys the position of security guarantor for a recalcitrant neighbor mired indefinitely with fragmented sovereignty.

The international community has not entirely ignored this cynically humanitarian mission. While some analysts warned of an emerging "Monroeski Doctrine" from the beginning, only recently have Western governments taken a more concerted effort to engage the Abkhaz peace process directly.[74] Specifically, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 brought the Transcaucasus into sharper focus for Euro-Atlantic realists. Likewise, the Rose Revolution of 2003 ushered a more democratic regime under President Mikheil Saakashvili into power and lent ideological rationale for support from Western liberals. These events reinvigorated the UN-led process but have not prompted any change in format. The Saakashvili government recently has increased its diplomatic push for a greater international role in resolving its territorial conflicts.

Through integration into the Euro-Atlantic alliance, Tbilisi hopes to alter the balance of negotiations in its favor. The Georgian State Ministry for Conflict Resolution points to the institutionalized international presence as an asset to

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[72] Cornell, *Georgia After the Rose Revolution: Geopolitical Predicament and Implications for U.S. Policy*, 28. Cabinet positions include Abkhazia's defense minister and chief of staff.

[73] NATO and Georgian officials. Interviews by author, 1, 4 October 2007, Brussels, Belgium and Tbilisi, Georgia.

[74] Trenin, "Russia," 82-83.

more fully utilize.[75] The United Nations represents the primary international body within Abkhazia. While this organization may offer the best opportunity for dialogue among the involved parties, its composition presents serious obstacles to effective resolution.

Theoretically, the UN represents the ultimate expression of liberal institutions, with even the smallest independent state wielding an equal vote with the strongest of superpowers. In this way, its liberal tenets run counter to those of NATO. Rather than discriminating its membership to exclusively liberal democracies, as does NATO, the UN embraces all nation-states regardless of illiberal domestic politics.[76] Additionally, it simultaneously acknowledges the importance of great power influence. The UN Security Council (UNSC) represents the clearest expression of realism in an international organization; it institutionalizes the notion that the world cannot force a great power, defined here as a permanent member of the council, into actions counter to its interests. Therefore, Russia holds a powerful voice within any activity with UN oversight.

The United Nations responded to the civil wars of 1991-1994 with nearly a dozen security council resolutions but delegated the negotiation process to the (then) CSCE with Russia as the mediator. The UN's most concrete action was to dispatch a team of ten observers in August 1993 and to later expand it and designate it the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). The mission's mandate limited its role to monitoring and verifying the cease-fire agreement and observing the CISPKF, who did not readily accept the observers.[77] The language of the resolutions gives the impression of ivory tower solutions with little real grasp of the complex, multifaceted situation in the conflict zone.

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[75] Mission of Georgia to NATO, "NON-PAPER Concerning Georgia's Efforts in Peaceful Resolution of the Conflicts on the Territory of Georgia," 28 September 2007, Annex 2.

[76] Gerry Simpson, "Two Liberalisms," *European Journal of International Law* 12, 3 (2001), 541-542.

[77] United Nations Security Council Resolutions: 854, August 9, 1993; 858, August 24, 1993; and 937, July 21, 1994. http://www.un.org/documents/scres.htm accessed 10 June 2007; also Svante Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus.* Surrey, UK: Curzon Caucasus World, 2001, 186-187.

Yet, the UNSC members seemed disinclined to real action. While strongly condemning the human rights violations occurring in Abkhazia, which it rightly labeled "ethnic cleansing," the council called for states to embargo all goods into Abkhazia save humanitarian supplies.[78] The greatest violations of this restriction, however, came from Russia, which provided both arms and personnel.[79] Considering that UNOMIG was already in place, it is reasonable to expect that reports of Russian participation in the conflict reached the UNSC. Yet further resolutions continued "Stressing the crucial importance of progress in the negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations and with the assistance of the Russian Federation as facilitator…."[80] The UN, having limited means and unable to act independently of the great powers, permitted Russia to continue its double standard: keeping the lead role despite its evident partiality.

The United Nations' involvement in Georgia continues to do little more than grant international legitimacy to Russia's actions. The latest UNSC resolution "[stresses] the importance of close and effective cooperation between UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force as they currently play an important stabilizing role in the conflict zone."[81] The UN has attempted to internationalize the peace process in recent years by creating the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General, which includes the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Russia; however, the group merely has observer status and can do little more than recommend options. The one red line that the UN has maintained is the adamant support for Georgia's territorial integrity. Russia is on record with each resolution as supporting this objective. Its actions, however, speak to the contrary; the activities listed above regarding citizenship and control of the de facto government give the impression of a virtual annexation.

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[78] UNSC Resolution 876, October 19, 1993.

[79] ICG, "Abkhazia Today," 6.

[80] UNSC Resolution 937, July 21, 1994. [emphasis in original].

[81] UNSC Resolution 1752, April 13, 2007.

Georgian membership in NATO would put the force of the alliance behind the principle of territorial integrity. Having earned intensified dialogue in November 2006, the Georgian government anticipates a Membership Action Plan by the Bucharest Summit in early 2008. However, there remain some allies reluctant to grant Article 5 protections in the face of increasing Russian aggression.[82] Only in a unified front, however, will the Euro-Atlantic community effectively counterbalance Russian influence.

D. CONCLUSION: CONFLICT OR APPEASEMENT?

Georgia's efforts to replace its traditional Russian protectorate with Europe and the United States have drawn mixed results. Despite the increased attention that Western states have bestowed upon Georgia's predicaments, one overriding fact has not changed. Russia's relations with Europe and the United States continue to overshadow relations with the smaller Caucasian states. As the Euro-Atlantic community gradually energizes to take on a larger role, it must choose between continued Russo-centric conciliatory policies or a more robust stance to defend Georgian sovereignty in the face of Russian interventions.

Geostrategic realities, such as energy access and the emphasis on regional security, are slowly changing perceptions regarding the need to resolve the frozen conflicts. However, despite Tbilisi's best efforts to revoke the CISPKF mandate, no viable replacement is readily available and premature withdrawal would likely result in an eruption of renewed violence.[83] Few observers dispute that Russia's participation in the Abkhaz peace process has perpetuated the conflict and clearly serves its own national interest. Yet the Euro-Atlantic community still has shown little resolve to intervene and internationalize the effort.

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[82] NATO and Georgian officials. Interviews by author, 1, 4 October 2007, Brussels, Belgium and Tbilisi, Georgia.

[83] International Crisis Group, "Abkhazia: Ways Forward," Europe Report No179, January 18, 2007, 15.

With regards to the Abkhaz conflict, the West has continued to gravitate toward the disengagement end of the spectrum. Russia's increasingly aggressive posture in the Transcaucasus region presents little hope for cooperation to result from continued conciliatory gestures. If Europe and the United States indeed assume the mantle of Georgian protection, the role will force them to take firm measures in confronting Russian obstructionism. The concern, of course, in Western capitals is whether ratcheting up the rhetoric will effectively counterbalance Russian aggressive diplomacy and lead to a resolution in the Abkhaz conflict; or will it instead widen the conflict and draw the great powers into opposition.

Since neither Russia nor the Western alliance stand to gain from open hostilities, it stands to reason that diplomats will seek every alternative short of this last resort. However, that conclusion does not rule out political, diplomatic, or even economic confrontations as the two sides flex their national might to further their interests. It also does not rule out the danger of armed conflict resuming between the Abkhaz separatists and Georgian government forces. Even though the 1992 civil war did not spill over into a regional war, the potential for such a contingency lingers as long as the opponents remain intransigent in their negotiations and distrustful of their security. Preventing Abkhazia from spiraling into warfare will require pressure from their respective great power sponsors to make bona fide headway toward a resolution. Russia, however, has calculated regional instability as more favorable to its interests than Western-led stability.[84] Therefore, the path forward for Euro-Atlantic policymakers remains narrow and treacherous with accusations of appeasement on one side and the threat of conflict on the other. In the case of Abkhazia, the Western allies have shown a predilection for the safer course of appeasement. Efforts to resolve the frozen conflict in South Ossetia have borne only slightly more results.

[84] David J. Smith, Senior Fellow at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, and Director, Georgian Security Analysis Center, Tbilisi. Interview by author, February 21, 2007, via email.

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III. SOUTH OSSETIA

A. INTRODUCTION: NATIONALISM AND IRREDENTISM

Just as in the case of Abkhazia, the roots of today's conflict in South Ossetia stretch back to the *divide et impera* tactics of Stalin's nationality policy. The nationalist fervor behind the conflict likewise boiled up in reaction to Georgian hyper-nationalism during the last decade of the Soviet Union. The Ossetians bolstered their claim to an ancient lineage, one that historically clashed with the Georgians and favored the Russians. They also emphasized a cultural linkage with their ethnic brethren in North Ossetia, a republic within the Russian Federation.[85] For its part, Russia has reinforced the status quo there as much as in Abkhazia, although in this instance through a slightly more multilateral mechanism. The Joint Control Commission (JCC) oversees the Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPKF) and consists of Russian, Georgian, South Ossetian, and North Ossetian representatives.

Here the similarities with the Abkhaz conflict begin to fade. As compared to the subtropical, potentially lucrative Black Sea resort area of Abkhazia, the mountainous, land-locked region of South Ossetia presents questionable opportunity for a viable, independent economy. For this reason, along with the ethnic link across the Caucasian mountain range, many Ossetians wish to be part of Russia. De facto president of the South Ossetian region, Eduard Kokoity, declared such intentions, officially requesting Russian annexation in the summer of 2006.[86] Moscow, while apparently endorsing the announcement of its client, has thus far resisted outright annexation as a legitimate option.[87] For as much

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[85] Edgar O'Ballance, *Wars in the Caucasus, 1990-1995.* Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1997, 99.

[86] Fred Weir, "The Coming of the Micro-States," *Christian Science Monitor,* 5June 2006 http://www.globalpolicy.org/nations/micro/2006/0605weir.htm accessed 1 September 2007.

[87] Ariel Cohen, "Is Russia Looking for a Fight with Georgia?," *Eurasia Insight,* 23 March 2006 http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav032306.shtml accessed 3 September 2007.

as the Kremlin has backed the separatists, acquiring land and appeasing irredentist populations do not appear to be its primary motivations. If such were the case, Russia most likely would have already attempted to seize the small region.

Relative to its interests in Abkhazia, the Russian government cares little for South Ossetia. The consensus among officials is that Moscow merely perpetuates the conflict there as a lever against Tbilisi consolidating its sovereignty.[88] However, Russia has enacted the same subversive means In South Ossetia as it has in Abkhazia, giving the impression of an insidious virtual annexation. As discussed in Chapter II, these measures include issuing Russian passports and declaring Ossetian residents Russian citizens; permitting visa-free Russian access for the separatists; and appointing Russian security officials into key cabinet positions of the de facto government.[89] These efforts have provided effective control in the domestic situation within the separatist regions.

The impact of Russia's policies toward these sub-state regions can be seen in its relations with Tbilisi. Having declared its intentions to protect the rights of all "Russian" citizens, the Moscow government has asserted its influence into affairs otherwise beyond its reach. A recent example highlights this phenomenon: in September 2007, the Russian Foreign Ministry demanded the release of two joint peacekeepers, held on charges of kidnapping, and claimed jurisdiction over them as Russian citizens. The Georgian Minister for Conflict Resolution countered that the individuals are residents of South Ossetia, even though they hold Russian passports.[90] Such incidents permit individuals a sort of diplomatic immunity to engage in self-serving activities, while elevating their implications to the highest national levels.

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[88] U.S. and Georgian government officials. Interviews by author, 3-12 October 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia and Washington, DC.

[89] Nichol, RL30679, 53; and Cornell, *Georgia After the Rose Revolution,* 1-2.

[90] "Russia Demands Georgia Release Detained Peacekeepers," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 4 September 2007.

Figure 6. The Formerly Autonomous South Ossetia (From [91])

[91] International Crisis Group, "Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia," *Europe Report* N°159, 26 November 2004, Appendix B, 31.

Beyond Moscow's apparent reluctance toward physical annexation, the situation in South Ossetia presents its own barriers to that particular outcome. In another key difference between this region and Abkhazia, the demographics within the former remain far more ethnically mixed. Prior to the 1992 civil war, the ratio of Ossets to Georgians within South Ossetia was approximately 65:25 and mostly intermixed. As compared to the ethnically cleansed Abkhaz territory, South Ossetia still hosts a significant Georgian population. Georgian and Ossetian villages reside within mere kilometers of each other; some villages even retain mixed populaces.[92] As a result of this diversity, there is very little consensus in the region over South Ossetia's proper political trajectory. The ethnic Georgians naturally favor reconciliation with Tbilisi; the Ossetians, on the other hand, appear divided over seeking independence, annexation into the Russian Federation, or reconciliation with Tbilisi. In response to this mixed composition, the Georgian government has employed a variety of strategies to resolve the conflict on its own. These efforts have ranged from coercion to cooptation, but the results have consistently depended on external influences.

B. AGGRESSIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION: THE AJARAN MODEL

The Georgian population remaining in South Ossetia provides Tbilisi with a degree of leverage that is simply not available in Abkhazia. The government's current conflict resolution strategy centers on fostering a parallel administration to rival Kokoity's de facto control. The logic of the plan is to peacefully alter the status quo by creating a new "legitimate" voice for the local population. Before discussing the relative merits of this latest peace plan, however, it is necessary to explore the more muscular efforts that have diminished mutual trust so badly.

The dramatic ascendancy of President Mikheil Saakashvili motivated the Georgian government to resolve the frozen conflicts with the same vigor that drove the Rose Revolution. The swift actions of the central government

[92] ICG, "Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia," Appendix B, 31, 5-6.

successfully returned the separatist region of Ajara to its control in 2004.[93] Similar efforts in South Ossetia failed to produce the same results. It is therefore worthwhile to compare the two episodes, which occurred within months of each other.

While the civil wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia forced their claims of independence, a host of smaller regions likewise resisted the central government's rule: Ajara on the southwest coast, Svanetia in the northwestern mountains, Akhalkalaki near the Armenian border, and the Pankisi Gorge alongside neighboring Chechnya.[94] Of these latter regions, Ajara posed the greatest threat to Georgian sovereignty due to its economic potential and strategic location on the Black Sea. Tbilisi gradually managed to force or cajole most of these smaller regions back into its fold, but its reintegration of Ajara bears significance vis-à-vis the two larger remaining standoffs. While some similarities existed between Ajara and its fellow autonomous regions, it presented many noteworthy contrasts, as well.

1. Similarities among the Separatists

Ajara enjoyed autonomous status under Stalin's divide and rule policy. One major unintended consequence of the Soviet autonomous regions was to reinforce the ethnic identities, which therefore imparted political legitimacy to the separatists. Moscow established within the Ajaran capital, Batumi, the organs of state control, without which a valid secessionist movement would probably have never congealed.[95] Under the banner of self-determination, therefore, these three sub-state entities rejected the idea of replacing Moscow's authority with

[93] Ajara is often transliterated in various ways, such as Ajaria, Adjaria, Adharia, etc. For purposes of consistency this thesis uses the simplest form.

[94] Anotol Lieven, "Georgia: A Failed State?" *Eurasia Insight,* January 30, 2001 http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav013001.shtml accessed 30 May 2007.

[95] Svante E. Cornell, "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective," *World Politics* 54 (January 2002), 274-275.

Tbilisi's.[96] Attempts to eliminate ethnic cultures created a "survival syndrome" that led to violent clashes along the periphery as the Soviet center crumbled.[97] However, as Russian control evaporated, its influence lingered.

As one result of the double civil wars of the early 1990s, Tbilisi grudgingly consented to hosting Russian military bases. Advocates argued that these bases provided stability and security in otherwise lawless regions. From the perspective of the Georgian government, however, the bases provided Moscow the ability to manipulate and destabilize the political situation as suited its purposes. The bases' locations helped foster this perception since three of the four garrisons resided in regions of minority unrest: Abkhazia, Ajara, and Akhalkalaki.[98] Beyond these structural similarities, though, the Ajaran case quickly diverges from the Abkhaz and Osset situations.

2. The Unique Aspects of Ajaran Autonomy

Two key factors distinguish Ajara from the other two cases: ethnicity and political goals. The Ajaran Autonomous Republic was unique in the Soviet Union as the only autonomous republic based on religion instead of nationality. The Ajars are, in fact, ethnic Georgians, most of whom adopted Islam during the 400-year annexation within the Ottoman Empire.[99] The religion itself is not important; rather, the significance lies in the common ethnic background shared with the central power. This factor most likely helped prevent armed conflict from erupting in Ajara during the period of ethnic violence surrounding the Soviet

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[96] Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study in Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus.* Surrey: Curzon Caucasus World, 2001, 175-176.

[97] Malia, 438-439; and Algis Prazauskas, "Ethnopolitical Issues and the Emergence of Nation-States in Central Asia," in Yongjin Zhang and Rouben Azizian, eds. *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders: Chinese and Russian Perspectives of the Central Asian Conundrum.* Oxford: St Anthony's College, 1998, 53.

[98] Ghia Nodia, "A New Cycle of Instability in Georgia," in Bertsch, Gary K., et al., *Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia.* New York, NY: Routledge, 2000, 198.

[99] Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers,* 175.

Union's demise. It also helped limit the base of support for any true secessionist movement. This factor therefore helped derive the second major difference.

As compared to the ethno-national wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the contest over authority in Ajara rarely left the political realm. In fact, the Ajar population never publicly voiced a desire to secede from Georgia. The rhetoric over autonomy primarily reflected the agenda of the region's president, Aslan Abashidze. Rising to power 1991, Abashidze created a medieval-style fiefdom to ensure his political longevity, which indeed lasted until his ouster in May 2004.[100] Through strong-arm tactics and a close, symbiotic relationship with Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, Abashidze managed to achieve an informal power-sharing agreement with Tbilisi similar to the one that Tatarstan enjoys with Moscow.[101] Yet even lacking an outright declaration of independence, Batumi exercised sovereignty to the point of withholding its lucrative oil trade and customs income from Tbilisi and thus pursued an independent economy.

Upon assuming office, President Mikheil Saakashvili immediately set out to restore sovereignty to the central government. Choosing Ajara as his first target, he swiftly increased diplomatic and economic pressure and finished with a blockade and military show of force.[102] Flush with hubris, he turned his attention on South Ossetia within three months of Abashidze's exile to Moscow and expected equally rapid results. He quickly realized, however, that the same formula would not easily work again.

Saakashvili perceived the primary factors to be political and economic; therefore, he formed his strategy accordingly. The new Georgian administration cracked down on smuggling in order to deprive the de facto leadership its illicit income. Coupling this firm approach with "humanitarian aid," Tbilisi expected to lure Ossetian support away from Tskhinvali and de-legitimize the separatist

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[100] International Crisis Group, "Saakashvili's Ajara Success: Repeatable Elsewhere in Georgia?" *Europe Briefing,* August 18, 2004, 3-4, 8.

[101] Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers,* 177.

[102] ICG, "Saakashvili's Ajara Success," 6-7.

regime.[103] Having overlooked the deeper nationalist root causes of the conflict, the vigorous campaign to undermine the separatists brought the state once again to the verge of open conflict. Georgia lost at least 17 soldiers in the process.[104] Georgian officials' misapplication of lessons from the successful Ajaran campaign cost them a decade's worth of trust built through the negotiated peace process.

3. Lessons of Ajaran Reintegration: The Sanakoev Gambit

The simple fact that Saakashvili's Ossetian campaign failed where his Ajaran endeavor succeeded is not prima facie evidence that the Ajaran case does not apply to the remaining conflicts. On the contrary, it appears that Abashidze's experience conveyed strong lessons. Rather than provide a patent recipe for regional reintegration, the events of May 2004 reinforced the Osset and Abkhaz leaders' fears of Tbilisi's intentions and led them therefore to entrench their de facto regimes even further. Likewise, the Georgian government realized that forceful solutions cause more problems than they solve.

From the separatist perspective, the July 30, 2004, law that redefined Ajaran autonomy amounted to subjugation to central authority. Especially worrisome for these truly ethnic separatists is the continued overlap between the Georgian *state* and the Georgian *nation* amidst official declarations. Elites in Abkhazia and South Ossetia view autonomy as any function that maintains their control separate from Tbilisi.[105] It is therefore not surprising that Saakashvili's carrot-and-stick approach met such stiff resistance in South Ossetia so shortly after the departure of Abashidze.

In addition to the psychological motivations, geographical factors combine to prevent a repeat performance. Given the long common border with Russia, Moscow wields considerably more influence in the Abkhaz and Osset situations

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[103] ICG, "Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia," 2.

[104] Dov Lynch, "Why Georgia Matters," *Chaillot Paper*, Nº86, February 2006, 42-43.

[105] Ibid., 32.

than it did in Ajara. Relative to the latter case, Russian interests in South Ossetia are also stronger considering its proximity to the unstable North Caucasus.[106] Coupled with the factors already discussed – the common Georgian ethnicity and narrow base of support for Abashidze – Russia's remote access to Ajara provided a window of opportunity for Saakashvili to exploit.[107] The lessons to glean are therefore more abstract and indirect.

Given the more distinctive features of Ajara's situation, the most important lessons for future conflict resolution can be found in the manner in which Tbilisi deals with post-crisis Ajara. The central government hopes to demonstrate the benefits of economic development through cooperation. In fact, The Georgian government has begun showcasing Ajara to Ossetians for that very purpose. In the summer of 2007, the government treated 1,000 Tskhinvali residents to a vacation in Batumi. Besides displaying the economic benefits of reconciliation, the trip demonstrated how ordinary Georgians treat Ossets with respect and dignity.[108] This approach marks the best example of turning the Ajaran experience to Tbilisi's advantage and addressing the much deeper popular support of South Ossetia's leaders.

As previously mentioned, the latest Georgian strategy to bend the status quo in its favor has been to encourage the rise of a parallel administration within South Ossetia. Dmitri Sanakoev, an ethnic Osset who fought for secession during the civil war, emerged in November 2006 as a popularly elected leader to rival Eduard Kokoity's control. Despite his ethnic heritage, Sanakoev's pro-Tbilisi position has earned him the support of Georgian-controlled regions and alienated the Ossetian districts. The central government has exploited this parallel regime

[106] ICG, "Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia," 9.

[107] David Smith, Interview by author, May 23, 2007, via email.

[108] Mission of Georgia to NATO, "NON-PAPER," Annex 1.

to broaden the negotiating parties and attempt to de-legitimize the Tskhinvali administration as a Russian puppet.[109] Fostering rival power centers has not necessarily improved stability in the region, however.

With his seat of power in Kurta, a village only four kilometers from Tskhinvali, Sanakoev postures himself as the one truly legitimate representative of South Ossetia. With full moral and financial backing from Tbilisi, he has undertaken to co-opt Osset support through reconstruction projects.[110] However, it is unclear to what degree he has managed to pull popular support away from Kokoity, who enjoys the full backing of Moscow and likewise engages in unilateral rehabilitation. The central government remains cautiously optimistic regarding its prospects for successfully and peacefully resolving this conflict.[111] On the other hand, some analysts fear the competing rehabilitation projects have wedged the Osset and Georgian societies further into isolated camps.[112] With the Kokoity regime firmly within Russia's control, hopes for achieving reconciliation increasingly fall on the international community to rebalance the peace process.

C. INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE THROUGH THE OSCE

The conflict in South Ossetia is less a story of the UN or NATO than it is about the OSCE. This organization has overseen the peace process since the 1992 Sochi Agreement ended the civil war.[113] Despite its long-term participation, though, the OSCE has faced difficulty affecting a final outcome to the conflict, largely due to Russia's ability to perpetuate the status quo. Generally speaking, Russian membership in most international organizations limits their ability to

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[109] International Crisis Group, "Georgia's South Ossetia Conflict: Make Haste Slowly," *Europe Report* N°183, 7 June 2007, 1-5.

[110] Paul Rimple, "South Ossetia Power Struggle Simmers on," *Eurasia Insight,* 31 July 2007 http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav073107.shtml accessed 1 September 2007.

[111] Georgian government official. Interview by author, 4 October 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia.

[112] ICG, "Georgia's South Ossetia Conflict: Make Haste Slowly," 23-25.

[113] ICG, "Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia," 4.

moderate Moscow's actions.[114] Most notably, the UN Security Council and the OSCE face Russian obstruction through Moscow's ability to block consensus.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is founded on the same liberal principles as the United Nations. Operating on the basis of consensus, the 56-member Permanent Council meets weekly to address relevant issues. On the surface at least, Axelrod's "long shadow of the future" should ensure that all parties cooperate.[115] As with the UN, though, an institution cannot force a state to contradict its vital interests.

The OSCE is the only institution with a pan-European membership, including the entire former Soviet Union. Additionally, the OSCE's consensus procedures provide Russia with an effective veto; therefore Moscow has traditionally favored working through this organization.[116] Beyond its role in the peace negotiations between Georgia and Abkhazia, the IGO has focused its efforts in South Ossetia. The OSCE's role in this peace process has been through the JCC, but only to observe the primary interlocutors. Considering that North Ossetia is a republic within the Russian Federation, Georgian officials rightly feel that the negotiating table is unfairly weighted against them.[117] Fifteen years of negotiations have failed to break through the deadlock; OSCE's objective participation has not helped balance the process enough to bring about a resolution.

Russia has also used its seat in Vienna to block OSCE security-related activities in Georgia. From 1999 through 2004, the organization fulfilled a border-monitoring operation along portions of the mountainous Georgian-Russian frontier. Following the increased hostilities of 2004, though, Russia terminated

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[114] Svante Cornell, et al., *The Wider Black Sea Region: An Emerging Hub in European Security.* Washington, DC: Central Asia – Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, December 2006, 46-47.

[115] Axelrod, 126.

[116] Dmitry Danilov, "Russia and European Security," in Dov Lynch, ed. *What Russia Sees.* Paris: Institute for Security Studies, *Chaillot Paper N°74,* January 2005, 91.

[117] ICG, "Georgia's South Ossetia Conflict: Make Haste Slowly," 1, 9-10.

the operation's mandate by the end of the year.[118] Simultaneously, Saakashvili repeatedly requested an expansion of the OSCE's mission in the conflict zone; each time Moscow rejected it in favor of the status quo arrangement.[119] With a new cease fire as of August 2004, institutionalists would expect to see a greater international presence to help enforce it, not a diminished one.

Russia's record with the OSCE is not completely one-sided, though. It has retreated in the face of united opposition from time to time. The most significant example occurred at the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit, in which Moscow agreed to remove its troops and equipment from Georgia and Moldova.[120] These bases not only facilitated influence within the host states but also personified Russia's lingering strategic concept of defense in depth. Yet, pressure from the organization, or more precisely from the consensus of member states, prompted Russian concurrence. Signature, however, has not translated into compliance; while the last of Russia's bases within Georgia is scheduled to close within the year, Russian military presence in Moldova's Transniestria region remain entrenched indefinitely.[121] Furthermore, the international climate has changed significantly since 1999.

In recent years the Russian government has taken steps to marginalize the OSCE altogether. Within South Ossetia the organization has shifted its focus to economic rehabilitation projects. This tactical shift, however, does not suggest acquiescence to Russian control of the peace process. On the contrary, local

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[118] Vladimir Socor, "France Leads the EU's Nyet to Georgia Border Monitoring," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 2:76 (April 19, 2005) http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?volume_id=407&issue_id=3303&article_id=2369613 accessed 25 March 2007.

[119] Andrei Zagorski, "Russia and the Shared Neighborhood," in Dov Lynch, ed. *What Russia Sees.* Paris: Institute for Security Studies, *Chaillot Paper N°74,* January 2005, 70-71.

[120] Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. "Agreement on Adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe." Istanbul, Turkey, November 19, 1999. http://www.osce.org/item/16335.html accessed 11 June 2007; and Dov Lynch, "Misperceptions and Divergences," in Dov Lynch, ed. *What Russia Sees.* Paris: Institute for Security Studies, *Chaillot Paper N°74,* January 2005, 16.

[121] Wade Boese, "Russia, West Clash Over Troop Pullouts," *Arms Control Today* 36, 1 (January/February 2006), 39.

and international analysts alike consider these relatively small confidence-building measures to be the most effective steps taken thus far toward reconciliation.[122] President Putin has since commenced public rhetoric denouncing the institution as biased against the CIS. In a recent speech to the Russian Federal Assembly he declared, "It is time for us to give the OSCE real substance and have it address the issues of genuine concern to the peoples of Europe rather than just hunting for fleas in the post-Soviet area."[123] Perhaps the president's visceral comments reflect frustration over the institution's effectiveness in restricting his foreign policy options, or perhaps simply a new attempt to redirect the institution to suit its interests.

On balance, the OSCE has delivered mixed results. The United States has supported OSCE involvement with independent statements generally paralleling the organization's official findings. For instance, the United States and OSCE each rejected the legitimacy of recent elections in South Ossetia that nearly unanimously re-elected de facto President Kokoity.[124] In light of the growing importance of NATO and the EU in greater European security, however, the OSCE has diminished in stature over the last decade. It registered greater success than the UN in limiting Russian aggressiveness and partisanship; yet it still faces that state's influence within its own organization.

D. CONCLUSION: DISENGAGEMENT OR COOPERATION?

Despite Russia's constraints on institutional cooperation, the Euro-Atlantic community has managed some minor steps toward conflict resolution. The grassroots economic programs run by the OSCE mark the one successful area of cooperation among the negotiating parties. The Economic Rehabilitation Program (ERP) focuses on joint, collaborative projects that benefit both ethnic

[122] ICG, "Georgia's South Ossetia Conflict: Make Haste Slowly," 21.

[123] Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly" (Kremlin, Moscow, April 26, 2007) http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/04/26/1209_type70029_125494.shtml accessed 11 June 2007.

[124] Nichol, RL30679, 12.

factions. Although funding for the ERP has barely reached one-tenth of the $260 million identified by the OSCE's Needs Assessment Study (NAS), the effort has laid the foundation for reestablishing confidence among rival local officials.[125] Unfortunately not all parties participate fully in this cooperative program. In fact, even though the JCC endorsed the plan, those same governments comprising the joint council undertake the most flagrant unilateral actions.

To its credit, Tbilisi's approach toward conflict resolution models itself on the European principles of liberal democracy, to include restoring constitutional order and protecting minority rights for all inhabitants.[126] However, concern lingers over President Saakashvili's impatience with the ERP; programs that bolster Sanakoev's legitimacy but which alienate the South Ossetian population risk pushing them closer to the North Ossetians. According to the de facto government, the South Ossetians distrust the West as pro-Georgian just as much as the Georgians view Russia as partial to the Ossetians.[127] Tbilisi's strategy hinges on convincing the Ossetians that the only obstacle to economic recovery is the Russian-backed regime in Tskhinvali. The Western role in this process is to ensure that all parties engage each other fairly and openly, and thus to prevent another outburst of hostility.

The matrix in Figure 1 uses "cooperation" to describe a case in which Western governments and institutions assume a conciliatory stance and elicit an equally magnanimous Russian response. In the case of South Ossetia, the Euro-Atlantic position has remained relatively neutral beyond its overall support for Georgia's territorial integrity. Frustrated with this international acceptance of the status quo, Tbilisi has unilaterally altered the situation in its favor through its support of Dmitri Sanakoev. This change has made the Russians, and therefore the Europeans, nervous.[128] Recent events indicate that Moscow does not intend

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[125] ICG, "Georgia's South Ossetia Conflict: Make Haste Slowly," 21-22.

[126] Mission of Georgia to NATO, "NON-PAPER," Annex 1.

[127] Ibid., 18, 22-23.

[128] U.S. Defense Official. Interview by author, 12 October 2007, Arlington, Virginia.

to cooperate toward a negotiated settlement. Practical cooperation is possible, though, on a very small scale, as demonstrated by the OSCE's record in South Ossetia. For better or for worse, the peace process now includes a new representative for the Ossetian population. The challenge for the West is to enforce joint solutions and establish the conditions for legitimate elections. It will take a firmer stance than heretofore seen to bring such elections to pass, however. The next chapter will examine the pattern of coercive incidents that demonstrate the degree and manner to which Russia appears inclined to exert its influence in the face of weak resistance.

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IV. PANKISI GORGE AND OTHER COERCIVE ENCOUNTERS

A. INTRODUCTION: DISCIPLINING A WAYWARD CHILD

From the point of view of Moscow, the Transcaucasus represents a natural extension of Russia itself. With its multitude of dynamics, this hostile land bridge has often provided a litmus test to Russian power: when Russia was strong, it controlled the region; when it was weak it lost that control.[129] In addition, the two centuries of entwined history leaves Russian elites with a sense a disgust at Georgia's westward turn. Having been raised to believe themselves to be saviors of the Caucasian peoples, they regard the Georgians as highly ungrateful for snubbing Russia's civilizing influence.[130] With this perspective in mind, it is logical that the goal of these ruling elites would be to encourage the rise of a more pro-Russian regime in Tbilisi. The question is how to accomplish this objective.

Moscow's approach has been two-pronged. One aspect is aimed directly at the Georgian government, intending to intimidate it into retreating from its westward orientation. The second aspect targets the Euro-Atlantic community, attempting to give pause to the Western alliance regarding the stability and reliability of its applicant state.[131] This framework helps explain a wide range of Russian international activity. For example, critics argue that President Vladimir Putin's recent suspension of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty is aimed at protesting the US-led initiative to place a ballistic missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic.[132] Regardless of his political objective, the proximate cause for Putin's decision centered on NATO's refusal to ratify the treaty. The rationale for this refusal focused on Russia's failure to abide

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[129] NATO official. Interview by author, 1 October 2007, Brussels, Belgium.

[130] President of a Georgian NGO. Interview by author, 4 October 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia.

[131] "Under the Umbrella: Why Georgia Must Join NATO," *The Economist,* 9 August 2007 http://www.economist.com/index.cfm accessed 12 September 2007.

[132] Jonathan Marcus, "Russia Sends Warning to the West," *BBC News*, 14 July 2007 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6898897.stm accessed 9 August 2007.

by the 1999 Istanbul amendments regarding its forces in former Soviet republics. Whether motivated by ballistic missile defense or Western interference in its "near abroad," Moscow's message is the same:

> . . . a key element of Russian foreign policy under Putin . . . has been to try to improve relations with the EU and western European countries in the hope of increasing divisions between the United States and Europe . . .[133]

Through this diplomatic form of "divide and conquer," Russia intends to prevent NATO enlargement into the Caucasus by exploiting fissures in the alliance. It also hopes to provoke a belligerent response from Georgia that would further dissuade NATO states from extending security guarantees to an apparently volatile nation.[134] This chapter explores the series of coercive episodes, both overt and covert, that have transpired within the last five years of Russian-Georgian relations. A common thread throughout these incidents has been the varying role of Western parties.

B. PANKISI GORGE: THE DIRECT APPROACH

The Russian-Georgian border has provided grist for international issues throughout the period of independence. Illicit trafficking of weapons, drugs, and human beings has thrived in areas beyond the firm control from either central government. Once the war in Chechnya erupted, the issue took on political ramifications, in addition to these basic economic and security issues. Georgia's Pankisi Gorge, which has hosted the majority of Chechen refugees and therefore drawn the brunt of Russian attention, is only about 20 kilometers long and lays about 40 kilometers from the Chechen border. This stretch of terrain consists of the daunting Caucasus Mountains. That border itself only extends approximately 80 kilometers, although Georgia's borders reach much further along other

[133] Karl-Heinz Kamp, "The Dynamics of NATO Enlargement," in Anatol Lieven and Dmitri Trenin, eds., *Ambivalent Neighbors: The EU, NATO, and the Price of Membership,* Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003, 197.

[134] NATO official. Interview by author, 1 October 2007, Brussels, Belgium.

Russian republics' boundaries. That so small an area can elicit such strong emotions demonstrates the fervor with which the neighboring states interoperate.

Russia's policies on secession and sovereignty clearly constitute a double standard: it fosters separatist movements in neighboring states yet suppresses them at home. Naturally, Moscow firmly refuses to consider independence for a nationality within the Russian Federation. At stake is the integrity of the federation itself. Debate lingers over the validity of this domino effect that Russian leaders so desperately fear. Certainly the mass Caucasian or Islamic uprising that Chechens hoped to inspire never materialized, but one could argue whether that indicates a lack of nationalist spirit in the other republics or perhaps a fear of suffering the same fate as Chechnya.[135] In any case, the Kremlin managed to avoid a broader front of separatist movements, at least for the time being.

Although the clumsy military campaign of the first Chechen war succeeded in discouraging other ethnic republics from following Chechnya's example, it also sent a clear signal to the newly independent states that military reintegration, on the magnitude of the Red Army's drive in 1918–1921, would not be forthcoming.[136] By 1999, when the second Chechen war flared up, the concept of independence from Russian authority had firmly taken root within Tbilisi. With the Collective Security Treaty (CST) expiring that same year, Georgian officials questioned the relative merits of remaining within this CIS security umbrella. The comparison with the Western democracies in terms of benefits accruing to Georgia was stark and illuminating.[137] The Georgians would no longer capitulate to Russian demands.

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[135] Dmitri Trenin, Aleksei Malashenko and Anatol Lieven, *Russia's Restless Frontier: The Chechen Factor in Post-Soviet Russia.* Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004, 46-47.

[136] Ibid., 169.

[137] Representative of The Strategic Research Center. Interview by author, 5 October 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia.

Along with its revanchist approach toward Chechnya's de facto independence, the Kremlin assumed a confrontational stance toward Georgia. The new Russian President, Vladimir Putin, expected the same courtesy that Yeltsin had secured regarding Russian troops patrolling Georgia's border with Chechnya. With nearly daily accusations by the end of 1999, Russia complained about Tbilisi's complicity in permitting Chechen rebels use of sanctuaries and staging areas. With scant evidence and misinformation, the diplomatic barrage gave the impression of creating a pretext for military incursions.[138] These threats failed to produce the desired results, however.

Through its rejection of the CST and amendments to the CFE Treaty at Istanbul, Tbilisi was asserting its control over its own security. By 1999, Georgia had expelled the Russian border guards and patrolled its own perimeter.[139] However, Moscow's description of the Pankisi Gorge sanctuary may have held a kernel of truth. Georgia indeed welcomed the Chechen refugees and even tolerated combatants as long as they remained peacefully inactive. In reality, Tbilisi exercised very little control over the region at issue.[140] The point of the matter was that Chechen refugees posed less of a threat to Georgian security than Russian forces ostensibly sent to keep order. Meanwhile, events on the other side of the world transpired that dragged the Caucasus into the international spotlight.

The immediate response in both Moscow and Tbilisi to the 9/11 terrorist attacks showed great sympathy for the United States. The ensuing war on terror, specifically the offensive against the Afghani Taliban, brought the Caucasus into the heart of U.S. national security policy. Independent of Russia's complaints of Chechen sanctuary in the Pankisi Gorge, US intelligence traced evidence of al

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[138] "Moscow Claims that Chechen Rebels use Georgian Sanctuaries," *Monitor* 5:223 (December 2, 1999), http://www.jamestown.org/ accessed 25 March 2007.

[139] Dmitri Trenin, *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border Between Geopolitics and Globalization.* Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002, 110-111.

[140] Jim Nichol, *Georgia's Pankisi Gorge: Russian Concerns and U.S. Interests.* Washington, DC: CRS Report for Congress, March 6, 2003, RS21319, 1-2.

Qaeda operating from the region as well. Reportedly, a phone call from a known operative within Afghanistan conveyed reports of the successful 9/11 assault to a contact within the gorge.[141] By October 2001, U.S. President George W. Bush agreed to send special operations forces to Georgia to train its armed forces in fundamental military skills and counterterrorism tactics, as well as democratic civil-military relations. The Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP) began in May 2002 with "train the trainer" exercises designed to create a self-perpetuating effect.[142] According to a participant in the program, the U.S. forces remained in the vicinity of Tbilisi without undertaking direct operations in Pankisi Gorge.[143] This limitation likely prevented an international incident as Russian forces were once again making aggressive overtures regarding the nature of Chechen refugees in the gorge.

Through the summer of 2002, tensions rose between Tbilisi and Moscow. A sporadic series of incidents, such as a raid against Russian forces in Abkhazia organized by Chechen leader Ruslan Gelayev and clashes between Chechen guerrillas and Russian troops just north of the Chechen border, continued to provoke the Kremlin's ire and demands for action. These events resulted in Russian air strikes into the Pankisi Gorge. The U.S. State Department quickly condemned the air strikes but Washington remained detached from Tbilisi's ensuing police action.[144] On August 25, 2002, following a warning published by Defense Minister Davit Tevzadze, Georgia sent troops into the gorge in an effort not only to hunt terrorists but to more directly regain control of the lawless territory. They succeeded in capturing a few wanted terrorists but mostly rounded up a large number of common criminals. The warning, much maligned by the Russians, served to prevent unnecessary casualties and soften the impact

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[141] Nichol, *Georgia's Pankisi Gorge*, 2.

[142] Ibid., 4-5.

[143] US Army Special Forces major. Interview by author, 15 March 2007, Monterey, CA.

[144] Nichol, *Georgia's Pankisi Gorge*, 2; and Trenin, Malashenko and Lieven, 172.

on legitimate refugees.[145] The operation contented European and American diplomats as fairly executed but failed to impress leaders in the Kremlin.

On September 4, 2002, President Putin sent a letter to his counterpart in Tbilisi which opened with friendly words of "allied cooperation and strategic partnership" but quickly shifted to criticize President Shevardnadze's "tactic of 'peacefully squeezing the terrorists out' [as] unacceptable" and offered Russian help in securing the border and safe havens.[146] One week later Putin's tone darkened in his speech commemorating the first anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks. In this address he accused the Georgian government of failing to effectively control the situation in Pankisi. He went on to invoke Article 51 of the UN Charter and the Security Council's Resolution 1373 as justification for unilateral self-defense actions to "liquidate" the perceived terrorist threat.[147] His remarks promptly elicited firm replies from the Euro-Atlantic democracies.

The United States government immediately issued its "unequivocal opposition" to such measures and offered to facilitate a negotiated solution. Europe likewise condemned the threat of incursion through the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), which went on to send an investigatory team into the disputed area.[148] Russia did not back down right away, however. On September 20, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov, along with Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Ivanov, met with President Bush and continued the call for action, presenting evidence implicating some Georgian

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[145] David Smith. Interview by author, March 14 and 23, 2007, via email.

[146] "On President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin's Message to President Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia on Topical Issues in Russian-Georgian Relations," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Information and Press Department,* September 5, 2002 www.mid.ru accessed March 24, 2007.

[147] "Statement by President Putin of the Russian Federation," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Information and Press Department,* September 12, 2002 www.mid.ru accessed March 24, 2007.

[148] Nichol, *Georgia's Pankisi Gorge,* 2-3.

officials as directly supporting terrorist cells.[149] They failed to change his mind, though. Not long thereafter, the crisis passed with a negotiated settlement.

On October 6, 2002, Presidents Putin and Shevardnadze met directly in Moldova and came to a mutually agreeable solution. The two heads of state jointly declared their intent to cooperate over the border. The reconciled position even provided for joint border patrols.[150] From one point of view, President Shevardnadze capitulated to Russian demands for access to the Georgian-Chechen border. A more reasoned perspective, though, holds that while Russia's bluster may have won that concession, it failed to gain unfettered access to Georgian territory such as it had assumed in the past.

From another point of view, the Kremlin's threats perhaps posed little more than a bluff. Assessments of the region illustrate the difficulty in traversing the terrain comprising the border area. As previously noted, between the head of the Pankisi Gorge and the Chechen border lay 40 kilometers of some of the tallest mountains in the world. Without roads to cross peaks that are snowbound for seven months each year, the utility of the region as a staging area for insurgent sorties is questionable.[151] Conversely, Russian forces would have severe difficulty running military counteroffensives through such terrain without a massive invasion force. In the midst of the crisis, a leading Russian military analyst, Pavel Felgenhauer, predicted that no such force of necessary readiness existed and could therefore be halted by Georgian forces alone.[152] It is difficult to determine the degree to which the terrain itself prevented a Russian invasion, but it certainly complemented the attention and support of the Western powers.

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[149] "On the Pankisi Crisis, the Ivanovs…," *Chechnya Weekly* 3:27 (September 23, 2002), http://www.jamestown.org/ accessed 25 March 2007.

[150] "Joint Statement by Presidents Vladimir Putin of Russia and Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia upon Conclusion of a Bilateral Meeting, October 6, 2002, Chisinau, Moldova," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Information and Press Department,* October 8, 2002 www.mid.ru accessed 24 March 2007.

[151] David Smith. Interview by author, March 14, 2007, via email.

[152] "On a Unilateral Incursion…," *Chechnya Weekly* 3:27 (September 23, 2002), http://www.jamestown.org/ accessed 25 March 2007.

In contrast to the initial years following independence, Georgia by 2002 had greatly improved its sovereignty even if it still lacked control over large portions of its territory. More significantly, though, the relations that Tbilisi had developed with the Euro-Atlantic democracies earned their backing when crisis returned to its doorstep. Russia could no longer arbitrarily deploy its troops into Georgia's territory or muscle a list of concessions from a splintered government. The events in the summer and fall of 2002 demonstrated Georgia's emergence as a partner to the Western powers, though certainly an unequal one. One must not forget, though, that Russia still maintains a great deal of power – diplomatically, economically, and militarily – and therefore rightly commands respect from Western leaders in international affairs.

As discussed in Chapter III, Russia used its position within the OSCE to terminate the border monitoring operation by the end of 2004. In April 2005, the EU declined to take over the mission and, out of deference to Russia, refused to even allow a "coalition of the willing" among interested nations, most notably the Baltic States. The response finally agreed upon committed only three representatives to a post in Tbilisi with occasional trips to the border.[153] Within two years of rebuking Russia for its bellicose posture in the Caucasus, the West bowed to its removal of objective international observers. Even with this counter example, though, Russia did not directly infringe on Georgia's sovereignty. What remains to be seen is how much military pressure Russia will attempt to exert against Georgia in the future. Additionally, what steps will deter Moscow's continued zero-sum outlook on national security? Events of this past year have demonstrated a continued effort to undermine the stability that Georgia is attempting to build through its reform and integration projects.

[153] Vladimir Socor, "France Leads the EU's Nyet to Georgia Border Monitoring," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 2:76 (April 19, 2005) http://www.jamestown.org/ accessed 25 March 2007.

C. KODORI AND TSITELUBANI: THE COVERT APPROACH

The experience of the Pankisi Gorge revealed to Russia that the Western democracies tended to unite in opposition to openly forceful diplomacy. If military threats draw inevitable reprimands, then perhaps a slightly more subtle approach would succeed. Recent controversial incidents illustrate this tactic. The mysterious aerial attacks on Georgian soil of 11 March and 6 August 2007 left little doubt in the mind of investigators that the culprits were Russian, even if they could not produce unequivocal evidence.[154] This thesis operates on the conclusion that both operations were deliberately planned and executed by the Russian government. Through plausible deniability, regardless of how thinly veiled, Russia manages to further its foreign policy agenda.

The sum of these incidents demonstrate that Russia considers its southern border to be a vital security interest and that it will elevate hostilities if necessary to prevent unwanted intrusions. However, the diplomatic and covert nature of these events also seems to indicate that Russia does not desire a direct military confrontation with NATO. A closer examination of the attacks in the Kodori Gorge and Tsitelubani will help shed light on their overall political ramifications, as well as their implications for Georgia's NATO integration.

1. Kodori Gorge: Nighttime Combined Arms Assault

While relations between Russia and Georgia have vacillated over the past 15 years, they plummeted in 2006. Early in the year, a mysterious explosion in Russian territory disrupted gas and electric supplies to Georgia. In the spring, Russia banned Georgia's two largest exports – wine and mineral water – claiming health concerns. Then in September, when Georgia arrested four Russian officers on charges of espionage, relations spiraled even further.

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[154] David J. Smith, "Russia's Attack on Georgia: The UN Report," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute,* 11 July 2007 http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4655 accessed 30 October 2007; and "Report from the International Group of Experts investigating the possible violations of Georgian airspace and the recovered missile near Tsitelubani, Georgia, 6 August 2007," International Group of Experts (including representatives from Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, and USA) 14 August 2007.

Rhetoric from both sides reached shrill levels and resulted in Russia extending the wine embargo to a complete severance of trade. Even more frightening was the sudden deportation of Georgians residing in Russia, along with discriminatory policies toward schoolchildren with ethnic Georgian surnames.[155] Diplomatic relations remained frozen until the Kremlin returned its ambassador to Tbilisi in January 2007, and not until the end of May did Russia allow Georgians the visas to travel within its borders.[156] Amidst these fragile relations, The Georgian government returned in force to the upper Kodori Gorge, a small region in the northern reaches of Abkhazia.

In July 2006, President Saakashvili sent interior ministry forces into this largely Georgian-inhabited territory. The purpose of the operation was to evict Emzar Kvitsiani, a local warlord who had renounced his loyalty to Tbilisi. Furthermore, Saakashvili declared the valley to be the new home of the Abkhaz "government-in-exile." As a result, the Georgian government successfully restored law and order to a previously uncontrolled space, in which smuggling and other criminal activity had reigned supreme. Despite assurances that all military forces have withdrawn and only police remain, the de facto Abkhaz government complains of an illegal occupation of what it considers its own territory.[157] UNOMIG in fact cited the Georgians with 13 violations in the police action's wake, mainly for transiting the Restricted Weapons Zone with heavy weapons, as delineated in the 1994 Moscow Agreement [see Figure 7]. The

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[155] Cornell, "Georgia After the Rose Revolution," 29-30.

[156] "Putin Sends Ambassador Back to Georgia," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 19 January 2007; and "Georgia Hails Russian Concession on Visas," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty,* 29 May 2007.

[157] Jim Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Political Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests.* Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, 20 September 2007, RL33453, 9; and Liz Fuller, "Georgia: Troops Deployed to Rein in Militia." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* 26 July 2006 http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/07/58819d15-fa9d-4bb9-a482-f4b38646bc50.html accessed 31 October 2007.

observer mission has since declared the Georgian forces to be non-military and thus legal.[158] Against this intense backdrop the new regional administration became a target the following spring.

Beginning at approximately 2100 hours on 11 March 2007, numerous witnesses reported hearing at least one helicopter in the upper Kodori valley. Within 30 minutes, rocket-propelled artillery shells began falling in intervals near three separate villages: Chkhalta, Zima, and Azhara. Fortunately, there were no casualties and the attack culminated in only one building receiving serious damage. Significantly, though, that building is the Chkhalta Regional Administration facility, site of the Abkhaz government in exile.[159] On the surface, the incident appears to be a political message forcefully protesting the Georgian presence in upper Abkhazia. The evidence also leads to this conclusion, although consensus requirements prevented the UN investigation from publishing that assessment.

The Joint Fact-Finding Group (JFFG) dispatched by UNOMIG noted several unusual aspects of the attack. For instance, counter to typical military doctrine, the assailants launched the artillery fire in single-shot increments rather than in concentrated salvos. Also, the presence of helicopters during an artillery barrage presents extreme tactical challenges; plus the two-hour duration with apparently only one aerial missile launched raised questions of practicality of a combined arms approach. Lastly the lack of response from the Georgian forces present in the valley led to debate over motives.[160] These discrepancies bear some interpretation, beginning with the latter.

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[158] Georgian and Abkhaz sides. "Agreement on a Cease-Fire and Separation of Forces." Moscow, Russian Federation, 14 May 1994. http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/MHII-65FB8X?OpenDocument accessed 29 October 2007; and US State Department official. Interview by author, 31 October 2007, via email and telephone.

[159] UNOMIG. *Joint Fact-Finding Group Report on The Rocket Firing Incident in the Upper Kodori valley on 11 March 2007.* Sukhumi Headquarters, 13 June 2007, 6-7, 9-11.

[160] UNOMIG, *JFFG Report,* 9-11, 17-18.

Figure 7. Security & Restricted Weapons Zones Monitored by UNOMIG (From [161])

The fact that Georgian forces demonstrated "an element of restraint from higher echelons" does not necessarily imply complicity in the incident.[162] On the contrary, initial caution seems prudent, especially given limited resources on hand and likely much uncertainty over the nature of the attack. Furthermore, the NATO allies have long been encouraging Georgia to moderate its behavior regarding the situation in the conflict zones.[163] To criticize defense officials for doing precisely what their prospective allies ask of them would be cynical at best.

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[161] United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia. http://www.unomig.org/glance/interactive_map/ accessed 29 October 2007.

[162] UNOMIG, *JFFG Report,* 18.

[163] NATO official. Interview by author, 2 October 2007, Brussels, Belgium.

In fact, Georgian authorities did react to the incident by raising the alert posture of all its armed forces. This included the immediate return of all off-station assets to return to their home bases. As a result, a pair of MI-24 helicopters departed Tbilisi shortly before 0200, encountered forbidding weather, and quickly aborted their cross-country transit. However, one of the helicopters crashed attempting to make its return to Tbilisi, given the limited visibility and inadequate instrumentation.[164] Although enough time had elapsed to allow the possibility that these helicopters had participated in the attack and then flown to Tbilisi, the circumstances of weather and avionics makes this conclusion highly suspect. Even in the Caucasus, where conspiracy theories run wild, the JFFG reached consensus on this point. The remaining points of controversy failed to reach such consensus, especially since the logical conclusions would be politically unpalatable to at least one party involved.

The JFFG report alludes to a great deal of debate over whether helicopters participated in the incident at all. Through crafty wordsmithing, UNOMIG acknowledged the dispute and went on to detail the immense circumstantial evidence, i.e. numerous ear- and eyewitnesses, pointing to the nearly two-hour presence of helicopters, not to mention the final strike of the night by an anti-tank guided missile (ATGM). While the report notes that "it is theoretically possible" to have been launched from the ground, it lists three distinct pieces of evidence indicating an aerial launch: angle of impact, accuracy, and a Russian munitions expert's testimony that the AT-9 "ATAKA" cannot be fired from the ground.[165] Besides countering the somewhat bizarre supposition that so many independent sources incorrectly identified the sights and sounds they experienced, additional evidence indicates even more clearly from where the culprits came.

Naturally the JFFG does not specify which side argued against the presence of any helicopters at all. The evidence cited, however, makes it easy

[164] UNOMIG, *JFFG Report*, 16.

[165] Ibid., 11, 17; and Smith, "Russia's Attack on Georgia: The UN Report."

enough to figure out. According to witness statements, helicopters first appeared in the eastern portion of the valley crossing the Klukhorski Pass from north to south. The timeframe of witness statements corroborates a westward movement; that is, residents of Azhara first noticed the helicopters about 30 minutes after the witnesses further east in Omarishara. The last sounds noted were moving north through the same path from which they came. Georgian radar covering the area ruled out flights by Abkhaz or CIS PKF helicopters coming from Abkhazia or coastal Russia.[166] However, the tall Caucasian peaks apparently obscure the northern passes. Thus the helicopters could only have come from one place. It seems the Russian side intended to cover its direct involvement by creating doubt over whether anyone was flying at all. In addition to the route of flight, the dispute over tactics bears considerable weight in identifying the source of the attack.

The controversy over what a helicopter would be doing in the vicinity of an artillery barrage illustrates the quality of forces involved in executing the attack. The mission was extremely risky. Flying with a combination of high terrain, no lunar illumination, and insidiously deteriorating weather – not to mention the need to de-conflict with incoming rockets and at least one wingman – indicates a highly trained and proficient military force. It also requires sophisticated night-vision equipment as well as effective command, control, and communication. "Only state-of-the-art combat helicopters with skilled pilots possessing high level of currency in night flying and familiarity with the terrain, would make such a mission possible but with grave risks."[167] Only the Russian Federation currently maintains this combination of elite capability within the Transcaucasus.

Russian actions after the attack gave even stronger indications of guilt than the activities in the gorge on 11 March. In contrast to the cited willingness of the Georgian side to cooperate with nearly every aspect of the investigation, the Russian Federation denied the JFFG two key bits of data. First, a request to

[166] UNOMIG, *JFFG Report*, 11, 14.

[167] Ibid., 14-15, 23.

track the lot number from the ATGM shrapnel went completely unanswered. This information would indicate which unit had taken possession of the weapon and, presumably, from where the mission originated. Second, Russia replied to a request for air traffic control records by stating that the armed forces only record when the military flies. Therefore, "since there was no Russian Air Force flights on 11-12 March in the mentioned zone, there are no recordings of such flights."[168] Such tautological nonsense gives the strong impression of hiding some piece of damning evidence. It is highly unlikely that Russia would be unable to produce radar records of an aircraft violating its own airspace, regardless of whether the Russian Air Force was flying. As the evidence stacks up to reveal the Russian military at fault, the question remains what tactical value would warrant such grave risks and such flimsy excuses to deny them.

The combined application of artillery and aviation provided mutually supporting effects. The helicopters presumably provided spotting and aiming corrections for the rocket launcher. Likewise, the ground fire added to the implausibility of aerial assets being involved. The planners may even have hoped that the one ATGM would be mistaken for a surface-to-surface rocket like the others. This line of logic highlights the political nature of the incident, since the operation does not make sense from a military point of view. The idea that forces with the techniques and technology to safely execute such a mission, yet who scored only one hit, supposes that the attackers only *intended* to strike one target. The logical conclusion, therefore, is that the entire special operation mission served a political objective: send a clear message of power without inflicting casualties that would risk an actual conflict.

The motives for such an audacious plan are multifaceted. The prima facie reason, as previously noted, was to physically convey Russia's displeasure with Georgian authorities in Kodori. Since Moscow is bound by its signature to officially support UNSC resolutions, covert action offers the most effective means

[168] UNOMIG, *JFFG Report*, 18.

of accomplishing this task.[169] The Kremlin surely realizes that such a message is highly unlikely to intimidate the Georgians into withdrawing. Therefore, the secondary intent was to provoke a hostile response and discredit Tbilisi's peaceful proclamations. The incident certainly put the government into a predicament. On the one hand, the population questions how such an event can happen and demands retribution. On the other hand, Georgia's NATO partners expect a calm, reasoned response to avoid further hostilities.[170] NATO itself thus represents the tertiary target of the intended message.

By demonstrating continued instability in the region, Russia manages to sow further doubt in the certain allies who are already hesitant over whether to invite Georgia into the collective defense organization. In a period of general "enlargement fatigue," a few allies worry about extending security guarantees to a state with simmering conflicts.[171] As noted in the 1995 study on NATO enlargement, however, the emphasis is supposed to be on the commitment to peaceful resolution, not on the resolution itself. By requiring the resolution of the conflicts as a prerequisite for membership, the alliance effectively hands Russia a veto over Georgian membership.[172] Under these conditions, resolving the conflicts in a manner consistent with Georgia's territorial integrity would become exceedingly difficult. Western responses to this Russian provocation have not matched this assessment, though.

The United States, along with its European allies adopted a cautious, neutral approach to the situation. The Western governments chose to accept the official ambiguities of the report as excuse enough to avoid confronting the

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[169] US State Department official. Interview by author, 31 October 2007, via telephone.

[170] Georgian Ministry of Defense official. Interview by author, 8 October 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia.

[171] Harry Lahtein, Chargé d'Affairs, Estonian Embassy to Georgia. Interview by author, 8 October 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia; and Pierre Lellouche, "Where's NATO Headed?" *NATO Review,* winter 2006 http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2006/issue4/english/art4.html accessed 7 February 2007.

[172] NATO, Study on NATO Enlargement, 1995 http://www.nato.int/docu/basictxt/enl-9502.htm accessed 5 November 2007; and NATO official. Interview by author, 1 October 2007, Brussels, Belgium.

aggressor. Instead, the State Department tried "to work with both sides to make certain that the temperature has cooled . . . [and] worked very hard for improving relations between Georgia and Russia."[173] Certainly, this goal is worth striving for; however, failing to address the source of the conflict merely encourages more instances of coercive diplomacy. Of course, taking the matter to the UN Security Council would not produce any concrete reprimands in the face of a Russian veto. On the other hand, by convincing the non-aligned bloc of temporary members and producing a 14-to-1 vote, the council would send a clear, strong message of international intolerance for such activity.[174] The intent is not to alienate Russia but rather to convey the message that 20th century power politics will no longer reap the same benefits that they did two generations ago. Predictions of further crises have thus far proved lucid; within five months of the 11 March special operations attack in Kodori Gorge, Georgia received another aerial intruder from the north.

2. Tsitelubani: Daylight Missile Attack

The mere fact of airspace violations into Georgia is nothing new and barely news worthy. In fact, unofficial reports estimate an average of 1 each month.[175] However, incursions that fire guided missiles constitute an act of war. In the early evening hours of 6 August 2007, a single attack fighter entered Georgian airspace from Russia on three separate occasions. Each time, the aircraft penetrated further into Georgian territory. On the third instance, the aircrew fired a Kh-58U anti-radiation missile in the direction of the Gori military radar site. Immediately upon detecting the launch, the Georgian radar crew shut off the radar as a defensive tactic. The missile, having lost its homing guidance, reverted to its last estimated position and missed the radar by approximately 5

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[173] Condoleeza Rice, US Secretary of State. Press Roundtable, 15 May 2007, Moscow, Russia http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2007/may/84922.htm accessed 30 October 2007.

[174] US government official. Interview by author, 11 October 2007, Washington, DC; and Smith, "Russia's Attack on Georgia: The UN Report."

[175] Georgian Ministry of Defense official. Interview by author, 8 October 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia.

kilometers. It landed harmlessly in a field near the village of Tsitelubani; apparently the warhead had not had time to arm itself, given the minimum range at which it was fired.[176] As with the incident in Kodori Gorge, the international community rallied to investigate the event, though not necessarily protest it.

Two groups of international experts convened in sequence to examine the data and publish its findings. The first group represented Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, and the United States; the second, composed of Estonia, Poland, and the United Kingdom, specialized in Sukhoi-produced fighters, missile technology, and radars.[177] Notably, with the exception of neutral Sweden, the collection of experts all came from NATO countries. The Russian Federation was able to express its views through the Joint Monitoring Group (JMG), though, as well as through its own independent investigation. The JMG report and the OSCE's spot report, both released within 48 hours of the incident, offer technical descriptions of the recovered missile and accountings of various eyewitnesses; however, they lack any real assessment of who perpetrated the attack and why.[178] Besides the Russian investigation, no international report contradicted another; rather each one added deeper analysis to the previous works.

Working without the need for consensus with the most likely suspect, the two international groups of experts (IGE and IIEG-2) enjoyed greater freedom to draw conclusions. Even so, the three reports all agreed that it is impossible to declare definitively the nationality of the aircrew. The last report came closest to assigning blame, though. It answered its own question regarding Russian involvement by stating, "The aircraft came from and returned to Russian

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[176] International Group of Experts (IGE: Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, United States), "Report from the International Group of Experts Investigating the Possible Violations of Georgian Airspace and the Recovered Missile Near Tsitelubani, Georgia, 6 August 2007," 14 August 2007, 1-2; and Independent Inter-governmental Expert Group (IIEG-2: Estonia, Poland, United Kingdom), "Report Investigating Possible Violations of Georgian Airspace and the Recovered Missile Near Tsitelubani, Georgia, 6 August 2007." 20 August 2007, 3-4.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Joint Monitoring Group (Russian Federation, Republic of North Ossetia Alania, Georgia), "The Report of the Joint Monitoring Group," 8 August 2007; and OSCE, "Spot Report: Tsitelubani Missile Incident," Vienna, Austria, 8 August 200.

airspace. The missile was of Russian manufacture. Within the region Russia is the only feasible nation capable of using the weapon correctly."[179] The question of feasibility is supported in two ways: First, the U-model variant of the Kh-58 is designed solely for Russian forces, not for export. Second, even if the Georgians had managed to acquire one through the black market, its air force lacks the hardware and avionics to employ this weapon system.[180] Therefore, the only logical answer to who executed the attack is the Russian Air Force. Just as was the case with the 11 March attack, Moscow's actions after the incursion helped solidify this conclusion.

Since Russia officially denied any involvement in the incident, its government again obstructed the investigation to maintain this façade. In contrast to its equivocal response to requests for radar reports from the Kodori Valley, Moscow indeed presented its own radar records of the 6 August timeframe. However, it only offered the sort of radar picture that displays aircrafts' transponder information rather than the "skin paint" of actual aircraft metal in the sky. Since the multiple Georgian radars that tracked the intruder confirmed that the pilot kept the transponder switched off, it was impossible for the Russian radar to display the aircraft's position. Rather than fool the investigators into believing the Georgians had falsified their own copious radar records, the Russians merely supplied data that "cannot support their claim."[181] What is interesting is whether the Russian officials actually believed that the investigation would come to any other conclusion.

Moscow in fact insisted on having an immediate investigation to "reveal the real organizers and participants of these very dangerous games." In the very same statement, one day after the attack, the Foreign Ministry gave its summary of the events: The "opponents of normalization" employed an SU-25 – notable as the sort of attack jets in Georgia's inventory – to intrude into the South

[179] IIEG-2, Annex A.

[180] Ibid., 3; and IGE,

[181] IIEG-2, 3.

Ossetian conflict zone "from the eastern direction that is from the Georgian side."[182] The direction of flight correlates with the later studies, and indeed crossed Georgian-controlled territory before entering the conflict zone. However, this manipulation of facts implies a contempt for the international community's will to seek the truth. The accusation that Georgia would bomb its own territory simply to avoid the multilateral peace process is fantastic at best and fails to stand up to the slightest scrutiny. Moscow chose not to stick with this storyline, but its second position was even more farcical.

Within two weeks of the intrusion, the Russian ambassador to the United Nations propounded that Georgia fabricated the entire episode, complete with missile fragments and simulated radar pictures. Not only is this assessment counter to that of the international (i.e. Western) experts but also contradicts the Russian peacekeepers who contributed to the JMG report.[183] Considering the hubris with which these two attacks were carried out, it is likely that even if one of the intruding aircraft had crashed, Moscow would have denied any ownership of the Russian-marked plane and Russian aircrew.[184] Yet, until the international community, or more precisely, the Euro-Atlantic community, is willing to take a stand on less than incontrovertible evidence, such provocations will most likely continue unabated.

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[182] "Commentary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Regarding Incident in the Zone of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, 7 August 2007 http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/02267e1ddd488ea5c325733200436e54?OpenDocument accessed 28 August 2007.

[183] Cory Welt, "Russia and Georgia: The Message Behind the Missile?" *Center for Strategic and International Studies,* Washington, DC, 27 August 2007 http://www.csis.org/component/option,com_csis_pubs/task,view/id,4016/ accessed 1 November 2007; and transcript of the ambassador's speech quoted in Svante E. Cornell, David J. Smith, and S. Frederick Starr, *The August 2007 Bombing Incident in Georgia: Implications for the Euro-Atlantic Region.* Washington, DC: Central Asia – Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, October 2007, Appendix F.

[184] British diplomat. Interview by author, 8 October 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia. Such an incident occurred on 19 March 1993 during the Abkhaz war. –Irakli Alasania, Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations, press briefing on the violation of Georgian airspace and bombardment of the territory of Georgia on 6 August 2007, 22 August 2007.

The Tsitelubani episode illustrates a growing divergence between Western institutions, namely the EU, OSCE, and NATO, and their member states over their respective willingness to act. Armed with intelligence information even more solid than the international investigations, the EU and OSCE in particular declined to acknowledge the facts and condemn Russian aggression. Similar to the UN's report on the Kodori Gorge attack, the OSCE published a diluted statement at the end of August that refused to assign blame and merely report the disputed positions. Unlike the UNOMIG report, however, the OSCE did not even send capable experts to conduct an independent investigation. Rather, it sent a diplomat, former Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Miomir Žužul, who simply compared the four reports and interviewed government officials.[185] Ultimately, such a report fosters long-term instability for the sake of short-term appeasement. More to the point, the OSCE suffers from a "fundamental dilemma: It can either function as a 'community' in consensus with Russia and remain irrelevant, or give up on the consensus with Russia and risk ceasing to function at all."[186] The EU does not even enjoy the same excuse of consensus requirements for its anemic response.

Beyond a terse, generic statement of concern from its presidency, the EU avoided the affair altogether. This lack of support did not escape the notice of the Georgian government, especially as Russia's concomitant resumption of strategic bomber flights *near* Norway and Great Britain elicited a stronger response than did the plainly hostile flight *within* Georgia.[187] Unless directly threatened, Europe tends toward a non-confrontational outlook on conflicts. This attitude reflects in its security culture, as well. Given their geographic proximity, the EU has typically favored a more accommodating posture toward Russia than

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[185] Transcript of Žužul's report to the OSCE, 30 August 2007, quoted in Cornell, Smith, and Starr, Appendix K, 7.

[186] Vladimir Socor, "Moscow Pleased with OSCE's Response to Missile Drop on Georgia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 4:167 (11 September 2007) http://eurasiadaily.org/article.php?article_id=2372410 accessed 1 November 2007.

[187] Georgian Defense official. Interview by author, 8 October 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia.

has the US approach.[188] This policy is not homogeneous, though, as demonstrated by the willingness of certain EU states to assist Georgia with objective experts. The EU must find a better way to accommodate Russia's interests and still deter its growing aggressiveness.

Essentially, the leadership in the Kremlin estimates that the Euro-Atlantic community simply does not place enough emphasis on Caucasian politics to risk its own blood and treasure. Particularly in such cases of extended deterrence, the aggressor must believe the interests of the defender to be strong enough to make the retaliatory threat credible. In addition, Prospect Theory anticipates that a state facing a potential loss is typically willing to accept a much higher degree of risk, as compared to one that is content with the status quo.[189] While Russia may judge the current status quo as the least offensive of available options, it certainly views the idea of NATO moving into its southern flank as a distinct loss of regional hegemony. As a result, Western attempts to deter Russian incursions into Georgia will be particularly difficult.

On the other hand, it is precisely the mutual defense contract within NATO's charter treaty that offers the most deterrent value. The situation thus becomes a case of circular logic: the intent behind Russia's aggressive behavior is to prevent the North Atlantic alliance from offering membership to Georgia, which would most likely deter Moscow's aggressive activity. Russia's renewed bomber sorties are significant in this context and relevant to the incident in Georgia. The Kremlin's nonverbal message to Western security planners is to show what is at stake for taking a stand against Russia on its borders.[190] The Cold War image of long-range, potentially nuclear-armed bombers patrolling the skies permits the invocation of another concept from that era: that of the Western democracies rallying together to defend their principles and interests

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[188] German Marshall Fund and Compagnia di San Paolo, "Transatlantic Trends 2007," June 2007, 10 http://www.transatlantictrends.org/, accessed 19 September 2007.

[189] Kenneth Watman et al., *U.S. Regional Deterrence Strategies.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1995, 6-7, 22-23.

[190] Welt, "Russia and Georgia: The Message Behind the Missile?."

from an aggressive non-democratic opponent. That is not to say that a new Cold War is emerging or that conflict is inevitable. Certainly the Russian Federation, despite its current assertiveness, does not remotely represent the same existential, ideological threat posed by the Soviet Union. The analogy should serve as a reminder, though, that deterring aggression requires unity and determination.

In this regard there are a few encouraging signs, at least on the latter point. The impartial assessments of the international experts allowed an objective counterpoint to Russia's anti-Georgian propaganda. Based on the almost non-existent response to the 11 March operation, this brisk reaction likely surprised Russian leaders.[191] Citing the international reports, the United States made a firm statement to the UN condemning the action.[192] Although Russia naturally blocked any resolution from the Security Council, the diplomatic forum allowed the United States and Georgia at least to voice their positions and push for greater international presence. The institutions have since swung, if only slightly, towards greater actual support for Georgia.

In mid-October the conflict zones reached the discussion agenda for both the UN and OSCE. The UN Security Council was simply renewing the mandate for the UNOMIG mission, but since these semiannual resolutions have become political statements their wording is significant. The latest version placed much greater emphasis on returning the internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their homes than previous resolutions, a move toward Georgia's negotiating position.[193] Similarly, at the behest of Denmark, the OSCE resurrected the issue of Tsitelubani to hear direct testimony from all expert investigators. Although the press release does not indicate if any concrete measures resulted from the discussions, recommendations included expanding the military observers and

[191] Cornell, Smith, and Starr, 22.

[192] Socor, "Moscow Pleased with OSCE's Response to Missile Drop on Georgia."

[193] United Nations Security Council Resolution 1781, 15 October 2007 http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/540/78/PDF/N0754078.pdf?OpenElement accessed 2 November 2007.

scope of authority beyond the tight restrictions currently imposed, to include monitoring the Roki tunnel on the Russian border.[194] NATO has also been facilitating improvements. Early in 2007, Georgia acquired an integrated Air Defense Command and Control System, part of which includes the 36D6 radar near Gori that the SU-24 was presumably targeting. Through hardware upgrades and live exercises, this system is ready to incorporate into NATO's Air Situation Data Exchange program.[195] Although the diplomatic front remained relatively quiescent and disorganized following the 6 August attack, the Euro-Atlantic community is beginning to demonstrate a degree of resolve with regard to Russia's coercive activities. It will likely require a good bit more unity and determination to prevent another mysterious covert operation on Georgian territory.

D. CONCLUSION: CONFRONTING AGGRESSION

Over the past five years the situation in Georgia has illustrated the most significant movement yet from the disengaged status quo of the 1990s. The collective US and European response to Russian intimidation over the Pankisi Gorge in 2002 marked the clearest example of a counterbalancing effect. The 2007 incidents, on the other hand, drew varied reactions ranging from continued disengagement to diplomatic conflict. The military aspect of the Pankisi Gorge affair highlighted its difference with the later events. The combination of the Russian Air Force overtly bombing Georgian territory with the president's threat of invasion made clear that he intended to enforce his diplomacy with armed force. In this circumstance of unmistakable aggression, Europe and United States had little trouble reaching consensus in opposition of Moscow's actions. Russia's apparent lesson from 2002 was to keep its coercion a bit less attributable.

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[194] OSCE, "Press Release: International Experts and OSCE Delegations Discuss 6 August Missile Incident in Georgia," Vienna, Austria, 17 October 2007.

[195] "The Statement by Colonel David Nairashvili, the Georgian Air Force Commander, on the August 6, 2007 Missile Attack against Georgia," Vienna, Austria, 17 October 2007.

In this way, the 2007 attacks in Kodori Gorge and Tsitelubani resemble mafia-style hits more than purely military operations. The intent of the missions went far beyond the minimal tactical gains they offered. Although clearly conducted by professional military forces, the two incidents presented just enough contradictory evidence to allow Moscow to deny culpability. However, the thinness of the cover stories indicates most likely that the Kremlin did not intend for anyone to believe them.[196] Instead the Russians apparently wanted Georgia and the West alike to know who was behind the attacks, to know who really controls the situation in the Caucasus. If there was any true mystery to the attackers' identity, the operations would fail to convey the intended political messages discussed earlier.

Threatening statements by Russian officials support this finding. For instance, following Russia's independent investigation of the August missile attack, Moscow's special envoy to the CIS, Valery Keniakin, made the following remarks at a news conference:

> If Georgia continues trying to worsen its relations with Russia ... on other major issues -- (Georgia's) Euro-Atlantic integration, its special relations with the West -- then Georgia will continue to invent these incidents in the future. If Georgia reaches the conclusion that it needs to have a balanced relationship with Russia, then the situation will change.[197]

In other words, as long as Georgia proceeds to act in ways unfavorable to Russia, then Georgia will continue to act counter to its own interests by attacking itself and fostering doubt in its prospective allies. Given the Russian propensity for accusing opponents of its own actions, the veiled threat becomes prominent. Deterring these implied actions will require the concerted efforts of the Western allies.

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[196] Cornell, Smith, and Starr, 21.

[197] "Russia, Georgia Talks Fail to Ease Missile Row," *Reuters*, 17 Aug 2007 http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSL1730069720070817?pageNumber=1 accessed 3 November 2007.

Deterrence theory does not provide much reason for great optimism. The perception among Russian elites of the Transcaucasus as their exclusive domain, coupled with their zero-sum outlook on international relations, leads to an extreme sense of loss when contemplating Georgia's accession into NATO. In addition, the simmering instability in Chechnya's neighboring North Caucasian republics most likely makes Russian policy-makers cautious about having NATO on its borders. From the Western perspective, NATO represents the infusion of democratic norms to formerly communist states.[198] However, the Russians most likely see a powerful, human-rights minded institution with a track record of acting counter to Russia's interests. The Kremlin therefore views keeping the alliance out of the Caucasus as a matter of vital interest. Russian leaders also likely consider this policy goal as attainable, especially in light of NATO's difficulties in Afghanistan and internal debates over transformation. This sentiment thus makes it all the more urgent for the Euro-Atlantic community to strive for consensus on its Caucasus policy.

In this regard the experience of the Baltic States offers some insight into NATO enlargement within the former Soviet space. Similar in many ways, there are three key differences between the Baltics and the Caucasus that must be remembered. First, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia never shared the centuries-long common heritage with Russia that the Georgians did. Rather, they represented the most westward-oriented republics within the Soviet Union. Second, the geopolitical tensions of the North Caucasus provide an element that did not exist prior to the 2004 round of enlargement. Lastly, Russia enjoys much greater relative power now than it held only three years ago.[199] Despite these significant differences, the Baltic accession into NATO provides at least two crucial lessons.

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[198] Harry Lahtein, Chargé d'Affairs, Estonian Embassy to Georgia. Interview by author, 8 October 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia.

[199] Lithuanian diplomat. Interview by author, 1 October 2007, Brussels, Belgium.

The first lesson is that after all the rhetoric and coercive activity, Russia cannot restrict the sovereign choice of its neighbors to choose their security arrangements. The tandem lesson showed that once NATO committed to granting membership to the three post-Soviet states, Russia tempered its resistance and shifted toward finding a *modus vivendi* suitable to its interests. Not that their relationships are overly friendly now, as evidenced by the April 2007 diplomatic row between Moscow and Estonia, which included cyber attacks on the same order as the physical attacks in Georgia around the same timeframe. The question is whether the NATO allies are willing to apply these lessons or allow bullying tactics to win out.

There is little doubt that Russia will not compromise over Georgia. Therefore, there is equally little hope of reaching a solution through cooperation, at least not in the near term. A decade of disengagement that has produced scant progress in resolving the separatist conflicts demonstrates this point well. Of course, no one's interests are served through open conflict, not least of all Georgia's since it would almost certainly provide the battlefield. Unfortunately, having ruled out disengagement and cooperation as ineffective for achieving results, the only way to reach a counterbalancing effect is to risk conflict. Therefore, NATO ought to extend a membership action plan to Georgia within the year to demonstrate that Russia's coercion will not derail the process of integration. Ideally, the long-term result would be a cooperative agreement between a Western-integrated Georgia and a positive-sum-oriented Russia.

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V. CONCLUSION

A. THE FUTURE OF RUSSIAN-GEORGIAN RELATIONS

Considering their deeply interwoven past and overlapping cultures, there is little doubt that Georgia and Russia will share a closely linked future. In this way, the American War of 1812 offers a parallel to the current Caucasian situation. As Georgians were fighting to defend the Russian empire from Napoleon's invasion, the United States was struggling to secure its own sovereignty. Having won its independence in 1783, the fledgling democracy found itself at war with its former colonial master within living memory of the revolution. While the War of 1812 produced no tangible results at the time, it marked the last instance of armed conflict between the United States and Great Britain. A century later the former colony returned to Europe and helped defend the United Kingdom in successive world wars. In the process, the two nations have forged a special relationship based on their common heritage, values, ideology, and interests.

Obviously the analogy does not transfer completely to the Caucasus. For instance, no one expects Georgia to ever surpass the military and economic might of its former imperial master, even in a century. However, it is not unreasonable to anticipate a long and prosperous relationship between Georgia and Russia. The prerequisite to this benign future, though, is mutual respect for each other's sovereignty. Once Russian leaders recognize that the benefits familiar to them in Georgia will remain available when they relinquish de facto control of the separatist regimes, then progress can be made toward establishing economic partnerships. For the time being, though, current elite attitudes prefer monopolistic control over market competition and political coercion over partnerships.

The 1812 analogy also refers to a war to consolidate the newly independent state's sovereignty. The goal of 21st century politics is generally to replace war with deterrence. Georgia alone can neither deter nor defeat Russia in an armed struggle. However, the combined strength of 26 unified nations standing behind Georgia presents a cost that should outweigh any expected gain from a military incursion onto its borders. The point, therefore, is to deter war through NATO membership and eventually work toward an economic partnership with Russia. Through its actions in this and other issue areas, the West must convey that it has no argument with Russia, *per se*. At the same time, the Euro-Atlantic community must make clear that actions destabilizing neighboring states cannot and will not be tolerated. Through this firm yet fair approach, the Western democracies can begin to build regional security through political stability. This outcome ought to serve each party's interests.

B. INTERESTS AND VALUES

Moscow clearly has real and legitimate security interests in the Transcaucasus. These concerns include the threat of international terrorism and criminal activity along the frontiers of its volatile North Caucasian republics. Additionally, having a hostile government on its border outside of the Kremlin's control instills the fear of having its underbelly exposed. For this reason, Russian officials cling to a zero-sum outlook: allowing NATO to oversee Georgia's security equates to losing control over Russia's own security interests in the region. As compared to the UN or OSCE, NATO represents an effective security organization that functions independent of Russia's controlling influence. The alliance attempts to maintain institutional coordination and cooperation with Moscow through the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). However, the Kremlin prefers to operate either through the multilateral organizations in which it holds a veto, or through bilateral arrangements, not to mention the unilateral actions discussed in this thesis. Working through the NRC, though, requires mutual respect from all parties.

The West in general and the United States in particular is beginning to learn the necessity of considering Russian interests in their foreign policy. Relaxing its own rhetoric may help Washington encourage Moscow to temper its obstructionism and foster an atmosphere of genuine consultation.[200] Then the Euro-Atlantic community would be in a better position to work out common interests and avoid conflict over competing interests.

In order to work constructively with Russia's interests, though, the West needs to clearly understand what the Kremlin most desires. In this regard, Moscow has remained intentionally vague. Instead of estimating Russian reactions to foreign policy choices, Western states and institutions ought to operate with respect to their own interests and values.[201] The Euro-Atlantic community has its interests in the Caucasus, as well; only the intensity of proximity differs. To paraphrase Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., instability anywhere is a threat to security everywhere – especially in today's globalized world. Therefore, it is clearly in the Euro-Atlantic community's interests to resolve the latent conflicts and secure the lawless areas of the region. The benefits of this result do not merely accrue to one nation or institution. Russia may not be able to control NATO's actions but it will benefit equally from the stabilizing effect of the alliance's presence, even if only grudgingly accepting the reality of Georgia's accession. Coupled with these security interests are the moral arguments for engaging with Georgia.

This post-Soviet state has spent the past 16 years gradually developing a relatively liberal, market democracy. This transition has often progressed in fits and starts and is far from complete. Despite these limitations, Georgia still represents the best example of liberalization in the Transcaucasus. Much of this credit is due to intentional efforts by the government, especially after the Rose Revolution, to carry the nation into the prosperous European Union. Aiding in

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[200] Dmitri Simes, "Losing Russia: The Costs of Renewed Confrontation," *Foreign Affairs* 86:6 (November/December 2007), 50.

[201] Lithuanian diplomat. Interview by author, 1 October 2007, Brussels, Belgium.

this deliberate transition has been NATO's guideposts for reform. NATO's influence on domestic governance is beyond the scope of this thesis, except to comment on the security benefits of stabilizing Georgia's internal situation and providing an alluring alternative to independence for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. To return to a policy of disengagement would therefore not only run counter to Europe's post-Westphalian values, but would also equate to abandonment of the fledgling democratic project.[202] This, in turn, would likely return the nation to oppressive regimes and foster further instability. It thus serves Euro-Atlantic interests and values to remain firmly engaged within Georgian affairs.

C. THE RUSSIAN-ATLANTIC INTERFACE

The Russia-first policies of many Western governments through the last decade have not improved regional security. Nor have they fostered improved relations between Euro-Atlantic capitals and Moscow, except on bilateral bases. This format serves Russian interests and undermines the former's ability to achieve their own unified interests. By allowing Kremlin leaders to exploit bilateral relations with member states, NATO and the EU will continue to have difficulty reaching consensus on policies regarding the former Soviet space. The experience of Russia's involvement in post-Soviet Georgia's development has shown that Western disengagement leads to Moscow forcing its will on Tbilisi. The 2007 attacks on Georgian territory likewise demonstrated that some European leaders still prefer appeasement policies when offered the slightest excuse for not confronting Russian aggression.

The record also shows that unified opposition, such as demonstrated in 2002 over threats to invade the Pankisi Gorge district, has effectively limited such overtly forceful activity. Consensus over granting Georgia security guarantees

[202] President of a Georgian NGO. Interview by author, 5 October 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia.

will most likely prevent repeat occurrences of this past year's covert actions.[203] Based on the state of its domestic politics Georgia likely remains years away from full membership. However, granting Tbilisi a membership action plan would demonstrate the NATO members' collective resolve to proceed toward the goal of accession. So far, no state that has received a MAP has since been denied membership; this crucial step therefore shows the process to be irreversible.[204] If the 2004 round of NATO enlargement is illustrative, at the point that MAP is offered, Moscow tends to recalibrate its efforts toward achieving the most beneficial deal out of the inevitable process. On the other hand, since MAP does not include the same Article 5 assurances that membership entails, there is some concern among allies that the Kremlin will view this step simply as its last chance to split the consensus over Georgia's prospects as a member.[205] There is no clear means of predicting Russia's reaction to Tbilisi receiving a membership action plan.

Undoubtedly, there are risks associated with confronting the Kremlin's heavy-handed diplomacy toward Georgia. However, the outcome of disengagement is more predictable and almost certainly negative. Of course, no one wants a conflict with Russia, but since cooperation in the near term is quite unlikely, the Euro-Atlantic alliance must be willing to risk the consequences of firm opposition to Russian coercion. This is the only way to achieve an effective counterbalance to Moscow's realist tendencies in the near to midterm. Since the West does not oppose Russia's presence in the Caucasus – merely its aggressive policies – there remains hope for long-term cooperation once Russian leaders eventually accept Georgia as a sovereign partner. By inviting Georgia to join its ranks, NATO itself would therefore come full circle: from a collective

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[203] "Under the Umbrella;" Cornell, Smith, and Starr, 24; along with a number of other authors.

[204] US Defense official. Interview by author, 12 October 2007, Arlington, Virginia; and NATO official. Interview by author, 1 October 2007, Brussels, Belgium.

[205] British diplomat. Interview by author, 8 October 2007, Tbilisi, Georgia; and US Government official. Interview by author, 12 October 2007, Arlington, VA.

defense treaty organized to prevent Stalin from conquering all of Europe to an institution diffusing democratic norms into his homeland to resolve the lingering effects of his nationality policy.

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